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THE MAN-HUNTER;

OR,

THE COUNTERFEITERS OF THE BORDER.

BY MARO O. ROLFE

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THE MAN-HUNTER;

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THE COUNTERFEITERS OF THE BORDER.

CHAPTER I.

A MIDNIGHT COMPACT.

IOWA. Then a territory. A. D. 1835—an epoch of border-crime and ruffianism.

It was the midnight hour, and the place the flat, uneven verge of a yawning ravine, in the depths of which a little stream was rushing on over its rocky bed to the Mississippi, whose muddy waters gleamed a mile away in the soft radiance of the midsummer night.

The moon shone full upon the scene, lighting every thing with almost the brightness of noonday.

A narrow, well-worn path was distinctly visible along the side of the chasm, winding into view around a sharp, jutting crag close at hand, and plunging out of sight in the midst of a dense growth of low, umbrageous bushes, a few rods further on.

The night was beautifully still and calm; scarce the rustling of a leaf disturbed the dead quiet, and no sound save the low, half-smothered dashing of the impetuous stream down in the bottom of the ravine, a hundred feet below.

A man crouched down in the shadow of a large boulder, close by the side of the narrow pathway, in an attitude of eager waiting. As he leaned forward into the moonlight, ever and anon, listening intently a moment, and casting a sweeping glance on every side, and then drawing quickly back into the darkness, he appeared a thick-set, powerfully-built person, of five and thirty, a casual observer would think, though he might

have been a few years older or a few years younger. His face was dark and swarthy, and his black eyes, overhung by bushy eyebrows, held a baleful light—a light of evil, that one never sees in the eyes of an honest man. His face was thick and brutish in its contour, and his wide mouth was entirely concealed by a heavy, bristly black mustache.

He was clad in the usual costume of the borderman—a loosely-fitting and ill-cared-for suit of dressed deer-skin, and armed with a long rifle which leaned against the rock at his side, a large, keen-edged hunting-knife, and a revolver sticking in his belt.

This man, crouching and hiding among the rocks at the dead of night, was too cautious to talk, even to himself ; but if his thoughts had formed themselves into words, they would have run something like this :

“ I have waited an hour, yet Joles De Kay does not come. He usually passes earlier than this. I wonder what can keep him so late to-night ? May be he didn't get drunk as soon as usual. But I'll wait with what patience I may ; it's only a matter of a little time, more or less—for, as soon as he gets drunk enough, he'll be sure to come, and he's just as sure to get drunk as—as I am of getting that little girl of his, and that's a matter of course. I know she don't favor my suit, but the old man will, and that's just the same to me ; for I think he'll prevail on her to act a little more reasonable by and by. I do believe he don't half try to persuade her to receive me with more favor, but I've got something to say to him to night that will wake him up, and set him at work in earnest. When he knows that one word from me will bring the Vigilantes down upon him—when he is aware that one word from me would be equivalent to a sentence of death by the rope, I think he'll use his influence to induce her to receive me a little more graciously. At any rate, I am going to tell him what I know about him, and see if he don't think it would be to his interest to aid me.”

By and by his quick ear caught the sound of footfalls along the rocky pathway, and the waiting man knew that the person approaching already had come around the crag, and was close at hand.

“ That don't sound like Joles De Kay's walk,” he thought

"The footfalls are too regular—a drunken man could not walk so. I wonder who it can be?"

While he still wondered, the figure of a tall and very slender person came in sight, and as the waiting man saw it, he gave expression to a quick cry of surprise, for, strange as it seemed to him, Joles De Kay was not drunk to-night.

"Stop, De Kay," he said, peremptorily.

The man turned quickly, alarmed at the sudden command, his hand seeking instinctively the revolver in his belt, and faced the other as he arose to his feet and strode out into the moonlight.

"Keno Taine!"

This name was a quick exclamation from the lips of the tall, slim man, as he pushed the revolver, which he had half-pulled out, back again into his belt.

"Yes, it is Keno Taine," said the other, coming closer. "You'd better leave your shooting-iron alone, before it goes off accidentally and hurts some one."

"I didn't know who it was," answered De Kay. "You surprised me. What were you hiding here for?"

"Waiting for my future father-in-law."

"How?"

"Waiting for you—and I hardly knew you. You ain't yourself to-night."

"Why?"

"Because you ain't drunk."

"It's no time to be drunk to-night. I've work to do."

"Work to do!" repeated Keno Taine with a loud laugh as he surveyed the other's lank form from head to foot. "Ha! ha! ha! Joles De Kay, a man would think to hear you talk that you were a man of business. Who ever knew you to work?"

"I work—" began De Kay.

"Yes, I know you do," interrupted the other; "and I can tell you what you work at. I know what you are doing, and I know the risk you are running."

The dark, deep-sunken, sottish eyes of Joles De Kay peered into his face keenly a minute, then he said hastily:

"No you don't know. What do you mean by risk?"

"Yes I do. It's all right, ain't it? All in the family you

know. I'm son-in-law, you know, and you're father-in-law, or will be."

"I don't know about that," said De Kay earnestly. "Evie don't like you very well—she hates you almost—just as she would if you were a great pile of sin and iniquity. I don't b'lieve she'll ever consent to the arrangement. You're far from being a saint, you see, Keno Taine—very far from being a saint—and Evie can't like you if she tries. She's a good girl, Evie is, a better daughter than I deserve—a good deal better girl than many a better man than I am has got. I don't believe she'll ever marry you, Taine."

"That remains to be seen," answered Keno Taine, coolly. "I don't think she inherits any of her angelic attributes from you."

"Perhaps not," he answered with a start, then he went on musingly. "I don't know why she should."

"She may have got some of her goodness from your wife."

There was a strange look on De Kay's face, which Taine noticed as he went on :

"I don't know any thing about your wife. I never saw her."

"No ; she died years ago, before I came here. Maybe if she had lived I wouldn't be the man I am now ; maybe I'd be better. We used to live well enough and get along very well together, Bertha and I, only she used to get the tantrums some times on account of my drinking. Then when she talked to me about the bad way I was going on sometimes, I'm afraid I wasn't always as patient as I might have been. But she's dead now, and I never think of her only with good thoughts ; for I believe she thought she was doing right, though her talk never did me much good ; and I feel sort of sorry sometimes because I didn't hear to her more. Once, I did promise to take a new start and try to do better, but it didn't last long and I soon got just as low down as ever, and since she died I have always kept going right on from bad to worse, and after I came to these parts, began to go to the devil faster than ever before ; and I'm down to Tom Gary's every night. I walk down and stagger back just as regular as the sun rises and sets. This is the first time I've come home sober in a long time, unless it was when I was busy.

How surprised Evie will be, won't she? But if you want any thing more of me, Keno Taine, do your business in short order, for I've work to do."

As he ceased speaking, Taine's loud, derisive laugh rung out again on the night air.

"Really, you are full of business to-night, Joles De Kay. Let me tell you what you are in such haste to do."

"You can't, for you don't know," answered De Kay. "No one knows what I am going to do to-night but—"

Keno Taine cut him short again with another low laugh that was half a sneer.

"No one knows but you—and Tom Gary and Harney Barmore—and I."

"You and Tom Gary and Harney Barmore," Joles DeKay said, repeating his words after him in accents of alarm. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that you three worthies are in business together, and I have seen you all at work. I know why you dare not go home drunk to-night. You want your nerves as steady as they can be, for you are going to write—you are going to sign and number a thousand counterfeit bills, and you have got some of them with you now. It will take you two or three nights to do this, and for two or three days you won't be drunk. You see I do know about your business, don't you?"

For a minute or two, Joles De Kay did not reply, but stood like a man under the influence of some deadly spell; his bloodshot eyes fixed in a dull stare of dismay on the face of Keno Taine.

"How do you know this?" he quavered at last, arousing out of his stupid fit, his lank body swaying to and fro for want of the strength that the accusing words of the other had driven away. "How do you know this, Keno Taine?"

"It matters not how I know it," answered Taine, slowly, never removing his gaze from the trembling counterfeiter's haggard and bloodless face. "You don't want your business very generally known, I take it—of course you won't take any extra pains to advertise it to the Vigilantes!"

Here he paused to watch the effect of his words. The thin, sun-marked face of the counterfeiter looked whiter than

before at the sound of the word *Vigilantes*—and that was all ; he did not speak.

“Your secret is safe with me,” continued Keno Taine, “as long as there’s any probability of its being an affair in my own family. I wouldn’t want my father-in-law strung up for counterfeiting—it wouldn’t be pleasant to think of, and besides, I shouldn’t like to have to tell my children that their grandfather was hung. Do you understand what I’m driving at ?”

And Joles De Kay did understand what his accuser intimated. He understood that if he could induce or compel Evie to become the wife of the man she loathed and abhorred, his secret and his life would be safe ; but he knew Keno Taine well enough to be equally well assured that if he did not do so, his secret would be made public and his life would pay the penalty of his crime—for the *Vigilantes* knew but one punishment, and that was death.

For months they had vainly tried to discover the haunts of the counterfeiters, and De Kay and his companions had cunningly eluded their vigilance, and they felt quite safe in following their nefarious avocation. But now, when they had nearly carried their plans to a successful end, their secret had been discovered.

Joles De Kay knew that Keno Taine’s disclosure of his knowledge of their gang and their place of labor would result in sudden and terrible death to himself and his companions ; and in view of these facts, which stared him sternly in the face, turn which way he might, he was ready to do any thing to buy his silence.

“Do you understand what I am driving at ?” again asked Keno Taine. “You don’t want the *Vigilantes* to get hold of this, of course ?”

“No. It would be sure death to all of us.”

“Correct,” said Taine, curtly. “Sure death to all of you—every mother’s son of you.”

Then he stopped again, and in his cool way stood looking the counterfeiter keenly in the face.

Joles De Kay did not speak, but his eyes sought the ground, and Taine saw by the moonlight that his haggard, sunken face was ghastly pale.

"But the Vigilantes needn't hear about it, if I keep my mouth shut," Taine went on.

"And you won't say any thing about it, if—"

De Kay hesitated, almost stammering at the close.

"If I think there's any probability of my ever being your son-in-law—of course not. Understand?"

"Yes. If I can make Evie marry you, all right?" said the counterfeiter—"if not—"

"If not, all wrong," broke in Taine, sharply. "You know what 'all wrong' means, don't you?"

"It means that you will tell what you know."

"Yes; it means that and more. It means the Vigilantes and— Don't shiver, man, they haven't got hold of you yet. Don't be a fool!" he added, as he saw Joles De Kay's lank frame shake as with the cold. Then he went on:

"The Vigilantes—a tree—a rope—death!"

The counterfeiter shuddered, and caught for breath.

"Stop!" he gasped; "don't go any further. I've got myself in a risky place; but if you'll keep still and not bring me out, I can make a fortune. Just think of it—Joles De Kay rich—rich—rich! Ha! ha! ha! Joles De Kay rich!"

His voice died away in a husky rattle, and he rubbed his horny palms together in his excess of joy at the miserly picture till they fairly cracked.

"You won't tell," he went on. "You won't tell, will you?"

"If you will promise me that your daughter shall become my wife within a month from to-night, I'll keep mum as a dead man; but if not—"

"If not?" asked the counterfeiter.

"Then you hang! Do you hear? Then you hang!"

"I promise!" whispered Joles De Kay, while those two words *you hang* rung in his ears. "I promise."

"All right then. And you must agree not to tell Tom Gary and Harney Barmore that I know about this business."

"I'll promise that too," said the counterfeiter. And Keno Taine turned away and left him alone, calling back as he went:

"Good-night, father-in-law."

CHAPTER II.

MORI, THE MAN-HUNTER.

KENO TAINE walked rapidly along the rocky pathway in the direction whence the counterfeiter had come a little while before, muttering as he passed around the projecting rock :

"The game works well. Luck seems on my side for once. The old rascal is as afraid of the Vigilantes as though each one of the ten was a long-tailed devil, living and working with a special view to his destruction. Evie will marry me, I'm thinking, before she will see her father swing for it. She's a real good, dutiful child, Evie is, and it's a saying no less true than ancient that a good daughter makes a good wife ; and if any man ever needed a good wife it's you, Keno Taine. There surely ought to be some good in the family, and there's very little in you, so you must marry good as some men marry money. Your father-in-law's facetious little remark about your being a great pile of sin and iniquity was more truth than poetry.

"But, I mustn't lag along here, jibbering in this fashion," he concluded, as he quickened his pace. "It's half a mile to Tom Gary's, and I'm going down there to see Tom and Harney Barmore work—and maybe I'll talk with one or both of them a little before morning. I believe I can speculate a trifle out of their business and not run half the risk they do. It was a lucky accident that led me to discover them at their little business last night, a very lucky accident."

In twenty minutes he stood in a narrow though evidently considerably traveled wagon-road, and right ahead of him, the only landmark save one, in the center of a small, grassy clearing, was the log cabin of Tom Gary, the counterfeiter. The other landmark was a tall, dry pine stub rearing its rough, half-decayed form up in bold relief against the azure of the clear summer sky, about two rods to one side of the cabin, and equally distant from the wayside.

The clearing bore no marks of cultivation, and it would

have been patent to one possessing less knowledge of Tom Gary's means of livelihood than Keno Taine, that, whatever it might be, farming did not contribute toward it.

The cabin was quite large, being two stories high, and the lower part was divided into two good-sized rooms, while an addition about twelve feet square, at the rear, made another apartment.

Years before, it had served as a sort of backwoods tavern, and even now belated travelers stopped there occasionally when the inclemency of the weather or the jaded condition of their horses prevented them from going on to the larger settlements on either side.

Behind the cabin an old and dilapidated stable was going to ruin; and this, with a shattered and creaking sign that had once borne the words, "*INN—By T. Gary,*" swinging by one corner, the fastenings of the other end having long since given out, from a decaying wooden arm above the front door, was the only thing that attested the use to which the rickety old structure had been put in the years gone by.

Strange, wild stories had been whispered among the settlers, of men who had been known to enter the old inn during the time when the business of its proprietor seemed to flourish best, and who were never seen to come out again. And vague, half-expressed suspicions of foul play had obtained, but no one ever knew with any certainty whether there was any foundation for them, and the matter passed without investigation.

And another wild tale had been told around the hearthstones of the pioneers—more improbable and awful than these. The old inn was said by some to be haunted. Two or three confidently asserted that upon certain occasions, at dead of night, they had seen the phantom face of a woman, with long disheveled gray hair, and wide-staring, ghastly eyes, pressed against the panes of one of the chamber windows in the north end of the tavern. Further than this they could say nothing; they saw it but a moment, for it vanished almost as soon as it appeared.

But at last, when the backwoods hostelry was frequented no longer, and the business dwindled down to nothing except a small retail liquor traffic with the worthless class of the

settlers, the stories were seldom repeated, and the suspicions hardly ever troubled the mind of any one.

As Keno Taine drew near the old inn, he paused a moment, and his quick eye passed rapidly from window to window on that side of the building, but he saw no light, and no evidence that there was any living being within.

"Just as I thought," he muttered ; "they're hard at work in the little back room, where I saw them before."

And passing hastily and noiselessly around the corner of the inn, he stood at the rear of the little addition ; and glancing up, saw the glimmer of a light from inside on a small window close at hand.

With the stealth of a beast of prey, he placed himself before the window and peered for a minute through one of the dirty panes and then withdrew his face with a long breath of satisfaction.

"There they are," he whispered, under his breath. "They're both there—Tom Gary and Harvey Barmore—and the money is on the table between them."

Pressing his face against the window again, he saw the two counterfeiters sitting at the opposite sides of a small table and the forged bills lying in neat piles before them ; and from their actions he surmised that they were counting them out to facilitate the work of numbering and signing, which had been assigned to Joles De Kay because of his superior skill in the use of the pen, which, had he engaged in any honorable business, would have secured him a liberal salary in almost any city in the United States.

The two worthies appeared engaged in a lively conversation, and Keno Taine desired above all things, just then, to hear what they were saying. At first he was at a loss for some plan by which this wish might be satisfied, and he stood for some minutes thinking intently ; then suddenly the affair took on a more hopeful aspect. His swarthy face lighted up a little, and he muttered, in low, quick tones :

"I've slept in this old shell time and again, and been in every nook and corner of it in the north end, and I b'lieve I can go in and up stairs. And if I remember right, there's a little cubby-hole there where I can see and hear every thing that passes in the back shanty just as well as if I was in there

with them. I'm going to try it, anyway. There's no one to look out for except the old hag that used to dispense the hospitalities of the concern in the good old days of yore, when there was an Indian-trader to rob or a land-prospecter to murder every new moon—and I don't apprehend much danger from her; for if the old rule holds good now, she's gone to bed drunk, and has been snoring soundly for hours. Old Electa Wink, they called her. What a taste she always had for gin cocktails! It was amazing! And what a lip she had for smashers and Tom-Jerrys and so on! Wonderful! And then how lovely she looked when she had to succumb at last, and sprawl out on the floor, face down! It was an enchanting picture! Here goes for luck!"

Gliding stealthily around to the front of the old inn, he tried the door very gently; and he found it barred. Many a man would have given up now. Not so Keno Taine. He was as crafty as a fox and as fertile in expedients as the born rascal that he was.

Without waiting more than a minute for thought, he ran across the road and gave utterance to a loud halloo. Scarcely had its sound died away, ere he repeated it louder than before. Then he hurried back and disappeared around the corner of the building nearest the door.

He was barely out of sight before a man came outside, and stood near the door a moment or two, looking about him and trying to discover the source of the cry.

"It's Tom Gary," thought Taine, peering around the corner of the tavern.

He was a medium-sized, brutal-looking fellow, about fifty years old, with grizzled hair and beard, the latter quite long and flowing down over his breast. He was bare-headed, and wore a loose-fitting, dark-colored coat that had seen better days. Taine beheld a revolver glittering in his right hand, and knew that he was a desperate character. Contrary to his expectation he did not cross the road, but stood waiting for the repetition of the cry.

Taine saw that his plan was not going to work as he had hoped. He had thought that the counterfeiter would leave the door. Had he done so, Taine would have slipped inside and made his way quietly up-stairs.

For a moment Gary stood looking about him, failing to discover any thing, and suddenly, when his back was turned, he felt the quick, heavy pressure of a hand on his shoulder.

With a dart of surprise, he turned to meet the dark, fierce eyes of Keno Taine fixed on his face, and the gaping muzzle of the revolver of Keno Taine almost touched his temple.

"Don't you speak above your breath, Tom Gary!" was hissed through the clenched teeth of Taine.

"What do you want with me?" gasped the counterfeiter.

"Money."

"Money?"

"Yes. Do you know what that is?"

Gary almost staggered with surprise at the cool demand.

"Have you turned robber, Keno Taine?"

"Oh no," was the cool reply. "You don't think so badly of me as that, I hope."

"What do you expect me to think, when—"

"Speak lower—whisper," was the stern command, uttered under the speaker's breath.

"What do you expect me to think, when you draw a revolver on me and ask for money?"

"I don't intend to rob you. That's out of my line. But I do want money, and you're going to give it to me, and I shan't compel you to do it, either."

"I give it to you?" said the counterfeiter, with increasing wonder. "I ain't in the habit of doing such things. I hain't got any money to give away."

"You've got piles of it in the shanty on the table, but I don't want any of *that*."

With a low, half-smothered cry Gary reeled back a step or two, and then stood regarding Taine with a look on his face of mingled surprise and dismay. Recovering his wonted coolness at last by a strong effort, he said, with a feeble attempt at bravado:

"What are you going to do about it, if I have got piles of it on the table in the shanty?" He was well aware, from the confident manner of Taine, that denial would avail him nothing; and he supplemented his bit of weak defiance with:

"If I have got piles of it as big as hay-stacks, is it any reason that I should give any of it to you? I must say

Keno Taine, that if you have not turned robber, your manner of asking charity is neither very humble nor extremely courteous. When a man solemnly says he is not a highwayman, and then demands money and attempts to back the demand with a revolver, I must admit that his profession and his practice do not agree."

"Don't speak so loud if you please," said Keno Taine, coolly. "I don't want any thing of Harney Barmore yet; so you needn't do any thing to attract his attention. I am going to talk awhile with you now, so— None of that! Put it back—no, give it to me. Quick, before I get nervous and fire off this revolver."

The counterfeiter had partially succeeded in raising his revolver, and Taine saw by the devil in his eyes that he meant mischief. He did not manifest any undue haste in handing over the weapon, but still kept his hand on the butt, though he half-thrust it back again into his belt.

"Come! Hurry up. You can't think how very easy this little six-shooter of mine goes off, especially when I get excited and my finger presses the trigger a little harder than I mean it shall. If you act so contrary about obeying orders, you'll excite me. I'm very nervous, as two or three men out in the diggings could tell you, if they hadn't died of my nervousness. Do you want me to get all of a tremble? When I do, I get the jerks in the forefinger of my right hand. I can feel it twitching now. I guess you'd better hand it over."

Gary thought so, too, a moment later, when the muzzle of the revolver was pushed forward till he felt it on his temple.

"Here 'tis," he said, gruffly. "Take down your cussed shooting-iron."

"All right," said Taine, as he proceeded coolly to examine the weapon. "But I want to admonish you again not to talk so loud. It's best that you should not," he added, as he thrust the counterfeiter's revolver in his belt, apparently satisfied with the examination; "for this business of ours is of a private nature—very private, it ought to be, you'll think before we get through—and it isn't necessary that Harney Barmore should know any thing about it."

He paused a moment watching the changes playing on the

counterfeiter's face, and then added in a somewhat louder tone :

"Or the Vigilantes either, unless you want them to."

If a bombshell had exploded at his very feet, Gary would not have started more violently or betrayed more sudden surprise than he did at the mention of the word Vigilantes.

Glancing around, he saw the keen, dark eyes of Keno Taine fixed unwaveringly on his face, now blanched almost as white as that of a corpse, and in their depths there was a cool, merciless look that sent a chill all through him.

"You ain't going to give me up to them?"

The words came from his ashen lips slowly, and his manner was that of a man talking in his sleep.

The manner of the other was baffling and tantalizing, and he answered only by saying with a half-concealed smile :

"Don't you think they would be willing to make it my interest to do so?"

"I don't know," he said as slowly as he had spoken before. "They have tried hard to catch us. We've kept out of their way for three months now. They have hunted the mountains and the forest through and through, and they have scoured the prairie in every direction, but they have never thought of this old shell. We've been pretty lucky so far."

"Yes, you three have had ten after you for months," said Taine, still eying him closely.

"Yes, ten's the number. I've seen 'em time and again, every one of the ten. It's more than three to one, but we've managed very nicely and I don't believe they ever suspected us for a moment."

The next words of Taine almost raised the counterfeiter off the ground.

"Yes, it's been ten to three all along; but now it's a hundred to three."

"What do you mean?"

Taine laid his hand on his arm.

"Fasten the door, so Barmore can't come out."

The counterfeiter hesitated a moment, but put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a large iron key, as he saw the revolver of the man in whose power he was, raised to a level with his face.

"Does it fit the door?" asked Taine.

Gary nodded assent.

"Lock it, then."

"I s'pose I've got to," he said, as he turned trembling to obey.

"Stop," whispered Taine, touching his temple with the muzzle of the revolver to enforce instant obedience, as the key grated loudly in the lock. "Be a little more quiet about it."

"It's an old lock," said Gary, "old and rusty, and it always makes an awful noise. We never use it—we always bar the door inside. I can't help its creaking."

Resolved that nothing should baffle him, Taine with his usual quick ingenuity, thought of a new plan. He was determined to hold a few moments' more uninterrupted conversation with Tom Gary, and it was no part of his plan that Harney Barmore should hear any part of it, and he was likely to come outside at any time to look into the protracted absence of his partner in crime.

"I want you to go to the door opening into the shanty and tell him that every thing is all right and that you have got to go away from the house a little while, and he must stay where he is till you come back. I'm going to keep close to you, and this revolver will touch your head all the time, and if you make even the least sign to tell him what is up, I'll blow your brains out in a breath. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes," was answered, half sullenly; for the counterfeiter knew that there was no course but to obey—he did not dare to think of doing any thing else as he felt the cold weapon pushed against his temple again.

"All right. Do as I say."

With the whispered command in his ear and the muzzle of the six-shooter pressed against the back of his head, forcing him forward, he obeyed.

A candle stood on an old chair, just inside the door, where he had left it as he came out, and taking it up, Gary crossed the room, minding Taine's whispered injunction to walk naturally and do nothing to arouse the suspicions of his companion, if he valued his life.

As they were drawing near the door which opened into the rear part, Taine, ever alert and suspicious, heard a sudden and singular sound, coming from one corner of the room.

He shoved the revolver against the back of Gary's head with so quick and violent a movement that the counterfeiter almost cried out with the pain of the concussion.

"Stop," whispered Taine, with his lips almost touching Gary's ear as the strange sound—something like a low groan, was borne to his ears again.

The counterfeiter paused and half turned round in his tracks, almost dropping the candle.

"What's that?" whispered Taine, pointing toward the invisible source of the startling sound.

"Old Electa," was the whispered reply. "I guess she's curled up in the corner and gone to sleep."

"Drunk?" asked Taine.

"Yes."

"All right. Hold up the light so I can see her."

Gary did as he was directed, and the rays from the candle fell on the uncouth figure of a woman carelessly clad in garments of the poorest material and the coarsest make, lying face down on the floor in a corner of the place.

"Yes," whispered Taine. "It's old Electa. Beauty ain't she? - Transcendently lovely."

"She was a beauty once," said Gary, chuckling.

Taine laughed inside at this, because he dared not laugh outright. The idea of such a drunken, angular, lean-visaged old hag as Electa Wink ever having been a beauty at any period, however remote, pleased him immensely.

"How do you know she was ever pretty?"

"I've seen her picture, taken when she was young," was the whispered reply. "She always has it with her, hung around her neck by a cord of braided yellow hair."

Keno Taine started as though he had been shot, and a deadly pallor overspread his face, at these words, but Gary did not notice his emotion.

At that moment there were sounds as of some one moving about the back room.

Gary half hoped that Barmore was coming out, and Taine feared the same.

"Open the door a little and tell him what I told you to," almost hissed Taine in his excitement. "If I notice the least treachery, I'll fire."

"What's up, Tom?" asked Barmore, when Gary's face appeared at a very narrow opening of the door.

"Nothing much. I've got to go away a few minutes. Don't leave the room till I get back."

Before Barmore could say any thing in reply, Taine pushed the door to, and whispered:

"You've done well. Come on now, and I'll tell you what I mean by a hundred to three."

In a moment they were out in the clear moonlit night again. Gripping the counterfeiter's arm, Taine led him to the tall pine stub near by, and stuck on the side of it nearest the road was a somewhat sightly written notice.

"See there," said Keno Taine. "A hundred men will snap at that."

Plainly in the bright moonlight, the counterfeiter read:

"TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD will be paid to any one who will communicate any knowledge that will lead to the apprehension of the gang of counterfeiters having their refuge somewhere in this part of the country.

"MORI, THE MAN-HUNTER."

CHAPTER III.

EVIE.

With one or two surly words of parting, Joles De Kay resumed his homeward way, the exultant, half-derisive voice of Keno Taine still ringing in his ears.

Clapping his hand to the breast of the thick, clumsy coat he wore, hanging on his attenuated figure, loosely and uncouthly, as can well be imagined, and assuring himself that the roll of counterfeit bills was safe, he muttered as he pressed onward, with long, rapid strides, along the rocky, devious pathway:

"Keno Taine knows all. He is not a man to stand much fooling, and I must do my best to bring Evie to our way of thinking—or to his, rather; for I don't think he'll ever make her a good husband, even if she should consent to marry him. Right here's where the trouble lies. *If* she consents. But will she—can she consent? He is not the right sort of a man to make her happy. But she's a good girl, Evie is. She's always been dutiful and kind and considerate of my feelings, and I haven't always been as good to her as I might have been; but I think she'd sacrifice her happiness, even, to save my life, if she knew that unless she did so, it must pay the penalty of my crime."

Increasing his already quite rapid rate of speed, he followed the well-worn path for half a mile further, and then it made a decided bend around to the right, and leaving the ravine, wound around through a narrow strip of woodland and disappeared in the road a little beyond, and De Kay found himself staring, wide-eyed with sudden surprise, at a notice written in a bold, coarse hand on a piece of paper and stuck up on the trunk of a large tree close by the wayside.

It was the same, word for word, that Taine pointed out to Gary a little later, as recorded at the close of the last chapter.

The counterfeiter read it through with a white, scared look on his rum-pinked face, and in his watery eyes, and gave utterance to a quick cry almost of dismay, as he saw the name signed at the bottom.

"Lucifer!" he half gasped. "Mori, the Man-Hunter! Then *he* is on our track. When he makes up his mind to accomplish any thing he is as sure to do it as fate itself."

The counterfeiter stood for a moment, silent, almost motionless, his eyes fixed wildly on the notice before him. Then he went on:

"Keno Taine knows our secret. He has it in his power to give us up to the Vigilantes. If he should do so, they would hang us; and I know him well enough to know that what he said is no idle threat—he will do what he says. But even if I buy his silence, have I any assurance that this human sleuth-hound will not hunt us down? A word, a *breath*, even, is enough to set Mori, the Man-Hunter, on the right track. He is a human hound, as keen of scent and as untiring as the

brute he so much resembles. If he ever suspects us we are lost. He follows up a bare suspicion as most men follow up a certainty. Once on our track, and he will hunt us to the death. For that two hundred dollars reward, almost every man along the frontier will be on the look-out for us. We will have to look out for them all. Every one will be against us and we against every one. There is no way but to hurry this job through and get the notes in circulation as soon as possible, and then we will have to go slow—probably stop work altogether till this excitement dies down a little.”

In half an hour he was crossing the little cleared patch of ground that surrounded his cabin, within which Evie was awaiting his return.

It was a cabin of logs, rough and rude in structure, built after the primitive style of our forefathers, but a pretty, home-like place withal; the mellow light of the moon falling on thick, tangled masses of morning-glory vines, twining in and out and trailing gracefully around the doorway and over the small windows at either side.

Joles De Kay had not trained these up. He had other things to think of, and if he did not have, he was scarcely the man to care for such things. It was Evie's work. Nor did the evidences of her refinement and care stop here. In front of the cabin, on either side of the narrow foot-path which ended at the door, were several little beds of lilies and peonies and heliotropes, interspersed here and there with rose bushes and lilacs, making the place really a beauty-spot in the wilderness, whose loveliness was enhanced by the soft flood of moonlight that lighted it up with almost the brilliancy of noonday.

De Kay half paused as he drew near the door, and cast a hasty glance about him.

“What a tasty little thing Evie is, to be sure,” he thought. “Who but she would ever have made such a wild place look like this? She's so gentle and refined and tasty. Keno Taine can't make her happy. She loathes and detests him, and almost shudders at his evil character. Her life with him will be almost a *living* death. But if she does not consent to it—if she will not do so to save me, then—”

He stopped short here, and the words that Keno Taine had

spoken that night seemed to ring again in his ears, causing a half-shudder to convulse his frame.

"Then you hang!"

"Yes," he said, almost under his breath. "If she will not save me by becoming the wife of Keno Taine, he will expose me and I will hang for it."

Opening the door quickly as he said this, he passed inside, his hand concealed by his heavy coat, griping the bundle of forged notes.

One who had noted the marks of womanly refinement and culture before the door, would not be disappointed by the appearance of the interior. Every article of furniture in the little room, though rude and homely in its construction, was remarkable for the scrupulous neatness and manifest good taste in its arrangement. A small, neatly-spread table was set in the center of the apartment, and upon it was arranged a simple though inviting supper, at sight of which the eyes of the hungry and weary counterfeiter lighted up with a look of grateful anticipation.

He tried, but could not entirely banish the troubled look from his face as he entered. His heart was the theater of contending emotions of mingled hope and fear.

There was a glad light in Evie's blue eyes as she stepped forward to meet him, and saw that he had done to-night what he had not done before for weeks—come home sober.

She was slender of figure, and slightly below the medium height, with wavy, golden-brown hair, and sunny, azure eyes, that just now flashed a world of loving welcome to the besotted man whom, with all his faults, she revered as a father, with all her true, tender, womanly heart.

"You are late to-night, father," she said, in a low voice; and Joles De Kay read her heart aright when he ascribed the cause of the happy light in her blue eyes to her joy at seeing him sober.

"Yes, business kept me longer than usual," he replied, scarcely daring to look her frankly in the face as he thought of the criminal nature of the work that had detained him.

"I have had your supper ready two hours at least," she went on, with a smile; "but I trust it hasn't spoiled—if it has it isn't my fault."

De Kay forced a laugh that was not half a laugh, it was so weak and so unnatural, and there was so little real hearty gayety about it.

"I feel as though I could spoil it," he said, as he took off his coat, as was his usual custom on coming in, and after assuring himself that the roll of counterfeit notes was still safe, threw it across a chair at one side of the room. "I'm as hungry as a bear."

Drawing a seat up to the side of the table, he sat down and was soon enjoying a hearty and much-needed meal; for it was now long after midnight, and he had not tasted food since dinner, and besides feeling half famished, he felt the need of his accustomed stimulants, from taking which he had abstained all day long, in view of the work that was before him.

Evie poured out a steaming cup of tea, and set it before him, then drawing apart, sat down on a rustic sofa at one side of the room. This sofa was not one of your modern parlor affairs, but the *bona fide*, old-fashioned article, so primitively and uncompromisingly rustic that it is doubtful if the reader ever looked upon its like. She sat there unnoticed by De Kay, apparently engrossed in intense thought, and she was aroused suddenly out of her abstracted mood by his quickly spoken request for more tea, when he had nearly finished his repast. She arose with alacrity, and after refilling his cup, stood behind him, watching his excited motions curiously while he emptied it and set it thoughtfully down by the side of his plate.

He arose at last, and without looking at her, went across the room, and half-reclined on the rude though comfortable sofa before spoken of, supporting his head on his hand, and appeared to be deeply buried in meditation.

Evie, wondering greatly what had come over him, and trying an old song as she worked, cleared away the remnants of his supper, washed the dishes and put them in their place, made a few preparations for the next morning, and then, walking up to him, placed one of her little hands on either side of his chin, and in a half-caressing way, raised his face till his eyes met hers, for the first time that night.

"What troubles you, father?" she asked. "Tell me, won't you?"

For several minutes he did not answer. She had allowed him to take his chin from between her hands, and he sat up with bowed head and downcast eyes. When he looked up at last she was startled by the wild look of pallor and pain on his face. She had seen him for years in all of his varying and passionate moods, but she had never beheld him thus before.

"What troubles you, father?" she asked again.

"You have always been a dutiful child to me, Evie," he said, in a broken voice.

Then he felt the gentle touch of her little hand upon his head.

"I have always tried to be, father. Perhaps I have not done as well as I might; but I'm sure I always meant to do as near right as I could. I don't believe you have much cause to complain—I never heard you complain. You were always very kind to me."

"I do not mean to complain," he answered, earnestly. "You have been a better child to me than I deserved—better than most daughters. You have done more for me and borne more patiently with me than most girls would have done for a father that has led such a life as mine has been."

"Don't speak so, father. I have done no more than it was my duty to do."

"And now I am going to ask a sacrifice of you, Evie," he said, slowly.

She did not speak at first, but stood looking at him inquiringly, striving to read in his face the meaning of his unexplained words.

"And such a sacrifice as it is," he went on.

"I would do almost any thing for you, father," she said, reassuringly—"any thing that I could do to make you happy."

He came to the point at once, in his excitement. He had not meant to do it so soon. It was too sudden, and he knew it before the words had fairly left his lips.

"Could you marry Keno Taine?"

If he had struck her in the face it would not have startled her more. She almost staggered, first, then leaning on a chair, white to the lips, her breath coming and going in gasps,

she repeated the words after him, like a girl talking in her sleep.

“ Could I marry—Keno Taine ?”

He only answered by a nod of the head.

“ He has asked me that question himself several times, and you have favored him and pressed his claim, and I have answered you both—No.”

She was standing up firmly and proudly before him, her blue eyes flashing with a stern resolve ; and he could not repress a feeling of pride as he noticed how pretty she looked, with her flushed face and determined manner.

“ I will never marry Keno Taine. I would rather die !”

He had meant to be careful and not say any thing to surprise or alarm her, but his intense excitement got the better of him again, and he almost yelled :

“ Then I hang ! Then I hang !”

She was too much startled at his strange, terrible words and wild manner to say any thing just then ; but he saw the questioning look in her face, and hastened to add, more calmly :

“ Don't be alarmed, little one. I spoke before I thought. But a great trouble has come upon me—or, rather, I have brought it upon myself, and my very life is in danger. Sit down here and let me tell you about it.”

He drew her to a seat beside him, and while she tried to say something to cheer him a little, sat quite still and silent two or three minutes ; then, when he thought of how little avail words could be to help him now, he checked her with an impatient wave of the hand, saying, slowly, and without looking her squarely in the face :

“ You have heard of the gang of counterfeiters that are said to have their place of concealment somewhere in this vicinity ?”

Her face lighted up at this, as though something had been brought to her mind that she had forgotten. Springing up, she crossed to the shelf above the fire-place, and returned bearing a piece of paper in her hand.

“ A man left this here to-day,” she said, simply. “ I did not think of it till you spoke of the counterfeiters, just now.”

Taking it in his fingers, he saw that it was the same notice

that he had read a little while before, and he shivered as he crushed it in his hand and dropped it down at his feet.

"Did you know the man?" he asked, after a minute.

"No. I don't think I ever saw him before."

"How did he look?" he questioned, eagerly.

"There was nothing strange about his appearance, I think, nothing that would attract the attention of any one to him more than to any one else. He was of medium size with light hair and eyes, the latter a very light blue, and I thought very sharp and piercing for such a color. His beard was quite heavy, and though not red, of a sandy hue. He was dressed in dark-colored clothes and wore a wide-rimmed black slouch hat, and carried a rifle."

"I don't think I know him," said De Kay, but a quick, violent start a moment before, while she was speaking, had given the lie to his words.

"It must have been Mori, the Man-Hunter," he thought. "He has light hair, and his eyes are like those described by Evie—very light blue, and very sharp and piercing for such a color—that expresses it exactly. As for his dress, that is neither here nor there, for his disguises are as numerous and as various as the leaves on the trees, almost. I wonder if he suspects me—but it can't be."

"Did he say any thing much that you remember?" he asked, "any thing that impressed itself on your mind?"

"No, he didn't talk much and he was here but a few minutes. I remember he said the counterfeiters would surely be caught at last; the Vigilantes are after them, and I gathered from his few words that they are resolved to make short work of it when they discover who the counterfeiters are. That is about all, only he wanted me to have you see the notice and thought that you would consider the reward offered incentive enough to lead you to try to ferret out the secret of the counterfeiters."

"Then he didn't ask any questions?" persisted De Kay, eagerly.

"Only who lived here, when he first came in, and soon, where you had gone; and when I told him your name and answered that you were absent for the day only, and would return at night, he wanted me to be sure and show you the

notice and tell you the reward would be paid promptly to any man that would give the Vigilantes any information that would lead to the apprehension of the counterfeiters. That is all. I presume a good many men hereabouts will be on the look-out for them. Perhaps you may be the man who is so fortunate as to secure the reward—who knows?"

She was almost frightened at the deadly look that came into his face as she ceased speaking. He was as pale as a corpse, and his eyes almost started out of their sockets.

"I—I—receive the reward?" he quavered.

"Why not, father?" she said. "Your chance is as good as anybody's else. I'm sure it is every man's duty to do what he can to aid in ridding the country of such a bad set of men."

"Evie!"

His voice was sharp and loud, and the name issued from his lips almost like a cry of pain.

She went up to him and laid her hand on his shoulder, and with a look in her sunny blue eyes half of fright and half of pity she said:

"What is it, father? Did I say any thing to displease you? Tell me about it."

Half tottering to his feet he folded her in his arms as he had not done before since she was a little child. He had never been a man to display much emotion, and Evie was sorely puzzled and astonished at his strange behavior.

"Evie," he said, "you won't loathe me and despise me for what I am going to tell you, will you? You are too good, and pure to be my child—you are not—"

"Don't say that, father," she interrupted, with a smile up into his haggard, pallid face. "I can never think of you except to honor you. What is the meaning of your strange words?"

"I am one of those counterfeiters, Evie," he said. "A price has been set on my head."

In her amazement and sudden excitement, she tore herself free from his encircling arms and faced him with a white face and staring eyes.

"You—you!" she said, faintly. "What do I hear? Am I dreaming? What does all this mean?"

"Don't!" he said; "don't look at me so! Don't scorn me for what I have done. It was for your sake as well as mine. I intended to stop by and by, when I had made a little more money, and leave this place forever. Then I thought we could live better and happier than we have lived here. But I have been discovered; my plans are failing; men will be hunting me down like a beast of prey soon, led on by the reward offered by the Vigilantes. I have always tried to keep you from learning what kind of a business I have been doing and what an awful risk I have been running; but concealment is no longer possible—the risk is greater than ever. You must save me. You can alone—"

She staggered back a step or two and would have fallen had he not caught her in his arms. When he laid her down on the rustic sofa he saw that she was unconscious.

When he had restored her to consciousness, and she was able to sit up again, he told her of her meeting with Keno Taine that night and of the power of the latter to deliver him up to an ignominious death. When she had heard him through, he asked:

"Will you save me, Evie?"

"To save your life," she answered, "I will be the wife of Keno Taine, but I wish I could die instead."

CHAPTER IV.

HUSH-MONEY.

"You know what that means, Tom Gary," said Taine, when the counterfeiter had read the notice to the end. "You have heard of Mori, the Man-Hunter."

"Yes," answered Gary, remembering things that he had heard of this same man, "curse him! I've heard enough about him and that infernal keen head of his to fill a big book. If he suspects us, we're lost as sure as fate."

The name of Oscar Mori, or Mori, the Man-Hunter as he was called, was as well known along the border as the Vigilantes themselves.

For more than a year it had been a terror to evil-doers, and the simple mention of it was enough to send a thrill of fear through the heart of any man whose business was not open to the inspection of the settlers at large. A year previous to the time of our story, the country had been infested by regularly organized bands of horse-thieves and marauders, such reckless characters as invariably follow in the wake of civilization as it takes its first steps toward opening up a new country.

At first the settlers were powerless to resist their depredations, and all attempts on their part to keep and defend their own property were uniformly unavailing. But such a state of things could not last always, and when Mori came among them and formed a band of Vigilantes, brave and true men, ten in number, and they set to work under his leadership hunting down the robbers and meting out to them such summary and terrible justice as their dastardly crimes merited and these stern bordermen knew how to dispense, a visible change in the aspect of affairs became apparent. Such of the marauders as escaped the common fate of all that fell into the hands of the Vigilantes, death by hanging on the nearest tree, fled the vicinity, going away, doubtless, to ply their nefarious avocation elsewhere. The Vigilantes had freed the country of horse-thieves, murderers and desperadoes to a great extent, and now regarded their work as nearly ended. But they resolved in the absence of civil and executive authority to inaugurate a judiciary of the settlers where all offenders should have the privilege of trial by judge and jury. Though regular legal authority was wanting, the settlers had resolved to preserve its power and enforce its ordinances, and very earnestly, very stubbornly were they carrying out that resolve.

The redoubtable Man-Hunter was a detective in the employ of the government, and after he had, by his decision and daring action, led the Vigilantes successfully through their desperate enterprise, breaking up the powerful gangs of cut-throat and thieving desperadoes that had infested the country, he was called away to other work, leaving them to maintain the comparative social order they had gained. And in this they had been successful beyond their most sanguine anticipations, never failing to ferret out any crime that was committed and bring

its perpetrators to speedy justice, until they became aware that a gang of counterfeiters were at work in their very midst, and all endeavors on their part to discover their identity or find the place of their unlawful business had proven futile.

Thus matters had gone on for some time, three months having elapsed since the Vigilantes were first apprised of the existence of the forgers, and at last, despairing of ever hunting them down unaided, they sent for Mori, the Man-Hunter, to assist in searching them out and bringing them to justice.

"So you are sure, quite sure, you know who is after you?" went on Taine, as Gary stood almost trembling before him.

The counterfeiter nodded assent.

"Then you know you're going to get fetched up, if you don't go pretty slow. You know Mori, the Man-Hunter, don't stop till he gets done."

"Yes."

"And just one word from me would put him on the right track at once. If left to himself, perhaps he wouldn't find you out for a month."

"Yes, if we could be safe for a week, we could finish up these bills and get them in circulation," said Gary. "Then we could get out of the way and snap our fingers at the Vigilantes, and, better still, at Mori, the Man-Hunter."

"If I tell them what I know," said Taine, as if he was discussing the most trivial matter of business, "I can get two hundred dollars for my trouble, and if I keep still and let you finish up this little job of yours, what then?"

"I will double it," said Gary, quickly.

"You mean you'll make it four hundred?" said Taine, watching him narrowly.

"Yes, I'll give you twice as much to keep your mouth shut as they will to blow on us."

Taine had the advantage, and he was not slow to see it. He laughed again, that low, derisive laugh of his, and when he had done, said jeeringly:

"You value your life highly, don't you? Four hundred dollars, indeed! Make it a thousand, and you live."

"A thousand!" repeated the counterfeiter, with a pallid face. "It's impossible—I can't raise it."

"Then you can die!" was the stern rejoinder.

For two or three minutes Gary stood as motionless as a graven image, and Taine, watching him keenly, read by the varying expressions of his changeful face that in his heart fear and cupidity were struggling for the mastery. He knew that cowardice would triumph in the end, and he leaned carelessly against the decaying pine stub, and stroking his heavy mustache, patiently awaited the certain issue.

But he kept his keen eyes fixed immovably on the counterfeiter's face, and as the minutes passed, he noticed that the look of fear and cupidity had given place to an expression of crafty cunning.

He knew as well as if Gary had declared his purpose now, that he was perfecting a half-formed plan to defeat him; and while he still maintained his easy posture, and kept on nonchalantly caressing his bristly, brigandish mustache, as though treachery was the very last thing that he was thinking of, he dropped his left hand, and holding his revolver behind him partially, was prepared to meet it whenever it should manifest itself in the actions of the counterfeiter.

But he soon saw that he would have no present use for the weapon, as it was evident that Gary did not intend any sudden violence, even if he had had the hardihood to attempt it, disarmed as he was.

He looked up soon.

"Well," said Taine, "what are you going to do?"

"The very best I can. There's only one way: I'll give you the money."

"I thought so," said Taine, while he could not but think there was something behind this apparent acquiescence. "It's your best plan."

Gary did not speak for a moment, but appeared to be thinking. Was he plotting yet?

Taine thought so.

"It's better than hanging," he added, with a searching glance in his face. "A thousand dollars is quite a little sum of money, considered abstractly, but when a man compares it with the value of his life, it dwindles down almost to nothing, you know. And when a man *makes* money, he can afford to lose a little now and then, and every thing you take in is clear profit. It don't cost you much to advertise, I sup-

pose," Taine added, with a facetious smile, punching him playfully with his finger.

Gary did not seem to relish this little joke particularly well, or if he did his face failed to show it.

"Never mind your sickish gags," he said. "I told you you could have the money, and you shall!"

"Right," said Taine, with a leer that showed half a dozen scraggy yellow teeth, with a wide gap in the middle of the row where a couple had been knocked out. "Right; you're talking business now. When will you dish up the stamps?"

"Now, if you want them."

Keno Taine looked at him sharply.

"Where is it? Have you got it with you?"

"No, it's in the house, though. Shall I go for it?"

"Wait. I want to talk with you."

"Well." Gary was growing impatient. "Harney Barmore will think I ain't coming back to-night."

"It's about him I want to talk—him and Joles De Kay. Listen a minute to what I've got to say."

"Go on—I've been here an hour."

"No you haven't; you're talking wild. It ain't twenty minutes since we left the house," said Taine, coolly. "Don't get impatient. The more haste the less speed, you know. But this is what I want to tell you. Don't you tell Harney Barmore and John De Kay that I know any thing about this little business of yours—don't tell them you saw me to-night. This must be in the bargain, and if you don't keep the strictest faith with me, you know what I can do. If you mention the matter to them, I shall know it—so be careful. Do you promise this?"

"I promise," answered Gary. "Shall I go after the money now?"

"Yes, and see that it's the genuine article. You can't fool me on money—I've handled too much of it in my time. I've made and lost thousands of it in an hour, time and again, at the keno game—mostly made at that game; used to scoop 'em all," he added, as his eyes brightened at the memory of the old exciting times when he lived by the gamester's arts. "That's how I got my name, my nick-name I mean—Keno—hitched to me. Time was when Keno Taine could show as

fat a pocket-book as the best man in Orleans, and when it came to a fight, he could command every "peeler" in the city ; but times have changed."

After he ceased speaking, he stood for a moment thinking with bowed head, his hands folded across his broad breast, one of them still gripping the revolver. Tom Gary turned and walked a few steps toward the old tavern, when he was halted by a sharp word from Taine.

"Stop!"

"Well, what now?" he asked, gruffly.

"I'm going with you as far as the door."

Gary had evidently not calculated on this; but he submitted, though with an ill grace.

"Well, come on; only don't keep me waiting any longer. Harney 'll think I've cut stick."

So saying he turned again and walked away, Taine keeping close behind him till they reached the door of the old log tavern.

As they turned away there was a strange, deadened, grating sound, that, had they not been so engrossed, must have attracted their attention, seeming to proceed from somewhere in the interior of the old pine stub; and a moment later the figure of a very lank and bony man began to crawl out of an opening at the side opposite to the place where Taine and Gary had been standing a moment since. His clothes, which were covered with dust and fragments of rotten wood, were of some dark cloth, and very odd and uncouth in style, the coat being a very long, swallow-tailed affair, gleaming up and down the front with large brass buttons; the pants, very small as to the legs, were checked with very large black and brick-colored plaids and tucked into a pair of enormous boots whose tops reached nearly to the knee; while his head was surmounted by a small skull-cap, that, taken with the rest, made him look, with his long legs and little head, as much like a pair of tongs as it is possible for a human being to look. His face was thin and yellow and decidedly cadaverous in its expression; his eyes were large and very blue, his mouth somewhat capacious, and his hair a light corn-color. If any further evidence was required to convince any one that he was a real, genuine down-east Yankee, it was forthcoming a

moment later in his voice, as he said, with a nasal intonation whose New England twang was unmistakable :

"The air's full of deviltry to-night—I'll be sworn. Fan me with yer boot, if 'tain't. Here goes to see what follers." And reaching through the aperture in the old stub, he drew out an old shot-gun that had evidently seen the service of years, and walked stealthily toward the old log tavern.

Laying his hand on the counterfeiter's arm, when they reached the door, Taine said, almost hissing the words in his ear :

"I'll give you just ten minutes, and no more, to get the money and bring it here. If you try to go back on your promise in any way, or if you ain't here with the money in your hand when the time is up, Mori, the Man-Hunter and the Vigilantes will be down on you before daylight! Understand?"

The counterfeiter nodded and laid his hand on the door-handle. The sharp metallic click of the latch and the hissing voice of Keno Taine struck his ear at the same instant.

"Mind! No treachery now. I shall be on my guard."

The next moment Gary had passed inside the door, and Taine stepped in after him, and after the counterfeiter went into the rear apartment, and Taine stood alone in the front room, he heard again the harsh, guttural breathing of the drunken hag in the corner, varied once or twice by maudlin mutterings as she turned uneasily from side to side.

Taking up the candle which had occupied its old place on the chair near the entrance during their absence, he crossed the room noiselessly and bent over the recumbent, uncouth form of old Electa Wink; and flashing the light in her face, he saw that it was angular and haggard, and sunken at the jaws, while her discolored, fang-like scrags, set at intervals of half an inch or more along her red gums, showed between her tightly-drawn lips, through which her offensive, gin-laden breath issued in short, irregular gasps; and her thin, straggling locks of iron-gray hair framing in the whole, made it any thing but a pretty picture to look upon.

Her old dress, dirty and almost glazed with the accumulated dirt and grease of months, perhaps, was unfastened at the top, and lying on her dirty and flabby bosom, he saw a

small gold locket secured to her neck by a slender, braided cord of silken golden hair.

In a moment he had raised her head and slipped the cord off; and letting her head fall back on the hard floor with a thump that had the effect of arousing her from her maudlin sleep, he held the locket up with a trembling hand, while the other had scarce the nerve to hold the candle whose light disclosed to his staring gaze the face of a woman in the first flush of maturity—a lovely face with blue eyes and long, beautiful masses of golden hair, the same in hue as that of which the yellow cord was made, which he held in his fingers caressingly, looking first at it and then at the matted hair of the hag. She had raised up on her elbow and was regarding him with a stupid stare. Of one thing he was certain. The hair that had been braided into the cord had never been taken from the head of Electa Wink, and the pictured face in the locket was as unlike hers as it is possible for two faces to differ, except that the complexion had been similar before the face of old Electa was marked by the ravages of age and strong drink.

“It is the picture of Blanche Gaudineer. If the old hag ever told Gary it was a picture of herself when she was young she lied, for no one but Blanche Gaudineer ever looked like this.”

Still holding the locket suspended by the cord of braided hair, he fixed his eyes steadily on those of old Electa Wink as she sat up, staring him vacantly in the face. He was possessed of a strange mesmeric power, the power of a strong will over a weak one.

“I am going to ask you some questions,” he said in a whisper, not wishing the sound of his voice to reach the ears of the two men in the other apartment, “and you will answer the truth.”

This was not a request. It was rather a command, and the old woman seemed to recognize its authority, and her eyes, no longer looking into his, appeared to be staring blindly at nothing.

“Yes,” she said, sleepily.

“And you will not talk loud,” he went on. “In whispers now, answer me,” and he held the open locket up before her

“Who is that?”

When she undertook to whisper, her cracked voice was almost a rattle, but he distinguished the words readily enough.

"Blanche."

"Blanche who?"

"I don't know."

"It was Blanche Gaudineer," said Taine.

"I don't know," she rattled, weakly. "Blanche is all I know."

"Where is she now?"

"In the—"

Her voice died away in a gasp.

"Go on," said Keno Taine, still keeping his eyes fixed on hers, while every action and every expression on his dark face betokened intense and eager excitement. "She is in the—"

"Yes— In—the—"

She was rocking backward and forward, almost sinking to the floor as her physical powers seemed to grow weaker and weaker.

"Sit up straight," said Taine.

With an effort, she attempted to steady herself in a more stable posture. Taine was about to speak again, when he heard the door open out of the rear room. Slipping the locket into his bosom he arose to his feet, dropping the candle to the floor, where its light flickered a moment spasmodically, and then went out altogether. Stepping into the center of the room, he met Gary, holding something gripped tightly in his right hand. At the same instant, some one entered the outside door.

"Here's your hush-money," said Gary, with a laugh, extending his hand.

"More than you bargained for," said the voice of Harney Barmore, as the ball from a revolver, fired from behind him, grazed his cheek.

"Here's your change, then," he said, coolly ; and he fired, and Barmore fell to the floor.

CHAPTER V.

THE SIX-POINTED SILVER STAR.

"To save my life," said Joles De Kay to himself, as Evie, with a face as white as marble and eyes out of which all light of happiness had gone, turned away and went out of the room. "She does it to save my life, but I'm afraid it's worse than taking her own, poor girl! God help me, if I have come to this—if I must buy my life with my darling's happiness—for she is more to me than daughters are to most fathers. God pity—God help *her*, and lighten the terrible burden she has taken up for my sake."

Joles De Kay's was not one of those coarse, unfeeling natures that can wound another without experiencing any remorse. He was not even criminal by any innate attributes, but he was weak and easily influenced by those mentally stronger than himself, and this rendered him correspondingly morally impotent.

He had been led to link his fortunes with those of Tom Gary and Harney Barmore, through a hope of speedy and easily-earned pecuniary gains; and this hope had dazzled him and blinded him morally and mentally, and shut out from his never very far-seeing gaze the terrible risk he was running.

For awhile he sat with head bowed on his hands, silent and gloomy, and his mind was filled with thoughts of the past and of the present, while hopes and fears crowded and jostled each other, each in turn predominating, and plunging him momentarily in the lowest depths of despair, and then raising him the next minute to the highest pinnacle of dazzling anticipation.

"This is no time for such weakness," he said at last, arousing himself with an effort. "I must work. The sooner we get this new issue in circulation, the better. There's danger ahead. Mori, the Man-Hunter, didn't come here for nothing."

Arising, he took two or three pens and a small inkstand

from the mantel-shelf and set them on the table. Then taking his coat off of the chair, over which he had thrown it on entering, he drew the bundle from the inside pocket, and taking off the piece of coarse paper which he had wrapped round it, laid down by the writing materials on the table, two hundred crisp, rustling counterfeit bills.

Then going to each of the windows in turn, he dropped the curtains, stretching them down at the bottom to make sure that there was no open place.

"There," he said to himself, as he crossed the room and sat down by the table, in such a way that his back was turned to the windows, which were placed one on either side of the door. "I'm all alone, now, with no one to see me, and no chance for any one to see, if there was."

But he was mistaken. The curtains were of stiff paper, and one of them, which had been tightly rolled for a week, curled up at the bottom, leaving a space about two inches wide, through which any one might have looked, had they been so disposed.

And scarcely had he begun work, signing and numbering the notes and stacking them up neatly on the table, before a pair of eyes were visible at the little place at the bottom of the curtain. They were black and piercing, and they glowed in the shadow which the counterfeiter's body cast on that side of the room, like twin coals of fire.

After a moment the blazing eyes were withdrawn and a hand appeared in their place which tapped two or three times on the window, and then that also vanished.

Joles De Kay heard this tapping, and starting up quickly from his work, he glanced uneasily around. But he saw nothing.

"Pshaw!" he muttered. "I am as nervous as a woman. It is nothing—nothing of importance; but it sounded like some one tapping very gently on the window; but it is nothing. 'The guilty flee when no man pursueth,' " he finished, turning again to his work of numbering the forged notes.

Soon the black, gleaming eyes flashed another sudden glance in through the window.

Then they vanished again, and in a minute Joles De Kay heard the noise repeated louder than before.

Rising from his seat at the table he faced around toward the window. He saw at a glance that the curtain was partially raised, and the thought entered his mind at once that he was being watched, perhaps; and while he stood revolving this fear and keeping his gaze fixed on the little space below the curtain, he saw the eyes for the first time as they looked for the third time into the room.

For a moment they stared into his steadily and keenly, then the hand appeared beside them and beckoned to him, and this time its fingers clasped something in the moonlight without—something in the shape of a star, and which De Kay recognized the moment he saw it.

"It is the six-pointed silver star," thought De Kay, "and the eyes are those of Lunita the squaw. She wants to speak with me, though what could have brought her here at this late hour I can't guess. It must be she scents danger. She's as keen as a fox, and no one else could serve us as well as she."

The Indian woman, Lunita, was a trusty agent of the counterfeiters, and did them valuable service in conveying their counterfeit money from their hands to those of their allies in one or two of the large settlements not many miles away, who went about from place to place throughout that section dickering with the settlers and traders and getting it in circulation.

Each person connected with the gang carried a token in the form of a six-pointed silver star to be used at any time when one member of the cabal, for such it was to some extent, failed to recognize another, or as a sign that one member wished particularly to confer with another; and when Joles De Kay saw this secret token, he knew instantly that Lunita wanted to see him, and he was assured at once that it was a matter of no common importance that had brought her there at that dead hour of the night.

"It's a good thing it was Lunita instead of some one else that found the peek-hole under the curtain," said De Kay, to himself as he went toward the door. "I'd rather see her eyes there at any time than Mori's. Curse him! he was here this very day, I believe."

Scarcely was he outside before Lunita stood beside him.

She was a woman of middle age, apparently, her face the same dark copper-color that characterizes her race. She was clad in a half picturesque, half slouchy dress of deer-skin reaching to her ankles, and her feet were incased in small, neat-fitting moccasins. Her long straight black hair hung negligently around her angular and bony face, and her large black eyes gleamed and twinkled like two stars as she said :

"My white brother is in danger. The great Man-Hunter is on his track. Lunita saw him to-day. He was here at this cabin."

"Does the Man-Hunter suspect me?"

"I don't know," answered the squaw. "But he is looking for the men that make the money. He left reward paper here to-day. Lunita saw him give it her white brother's child. There is a reward paper on every tree along the road. Mori will be searching for the men that make the money. Lunita has warned her white brother. Let him beware."

And without another word she turned away.

CHAPTER VI.

A PHANTOM FACE.

"THERE's your change!" said Taine, coolly, as Barmore fell, turning and confronting Tom Gary with leveled revolver. "There's your change, Tom Gary. Do you want any more?"

Gary held a revolver also; but he dared not use it, with the muzzle of Taine's weapon in his face.

"You treacherous devil!" yelled the infuriated man. "I'm going to kill you! Do you hear? I'm going to kill you!"

Like all great villains, Gary was a great coward.

Throwing up his hands in an attitude of the most abject terror he commenced to beg for his life.

"Don't shoot—don't shoot!" he quavered.

Taine did not pull the trigger, but kept the revolver aimed at his face.

His dark, scowling face told how deep was the passion that had been aroused in his breast by the treachery of the counterfeiter.

"You deserve death, you cowardly hound—you sneaking, treacherous dastard! You would have killed me!" he said, fiercely. "It makes me nervous to think of it. I can feel my finger twitch. I'm getting the jerks in my forefinger again; I don't believe I can keep it from bearing on the trigger."

Gary was trembling in every joint—his face ghastly pale—his eyes staring with sheer fright.

"Don't shoot!" he said, again. "Don't shoot!"

Taine laughed, despite his fierce, vengeful anger—he could not help it—that derisive, chuckling laugh of his, that, had Gary been any thing but the abject, terrified coward he was, would have exasperated him beyond all control.

"You poor, miserable coward," he said between his fits of laughing. "You are too timid for life in this world. It's a hard road to travel to such as you. Let me put you out of your misery, now. It won't be any harm, you see, if we look at the matter in the right light. You can think I did it for your good, just to keep you from being hung. So say your prayers, and prepare to cheat the Vigilantes."

The counterfeiter dropped down on his knees, and clasping his hands, kept on whining piteously as the hand of Taine kept the deadly weapon it held pointed at his head:

"Don't shoot—don't! Spare me!"

Taine laughed again, and was about to speak, when he was startled at the sudden and unexpected sound of a drawling, nasal voice at the door.

"He pleads like a desprit lovyer, I'll be sworn! and the ungrateful critter acts for all the world as how he didn't 'preciate yer good intentions, stranger. He don't deserve yer compassion by no means. Better let the Vigilantes settle his hash. I would—fan me with yer boot if I wouldn't!"

Turning quickly, Taine saw the lank, uncouth figure of the Yankee standing in the doorway, with arms akimbo, surveying the scene as well as he could by the dim light that

streamed in from outside, with a coolness and gravity that is seldom equaled, never excelled. His old shot-gun leaned against the door-post by his side, and, judging from his attitude, he must have been an unobserved spectator of what was transpiring for several minutes, at least, before he spoke.

"Evenin', stranger," said the Yankee, when he saw that Taine was looking at him.

Taine returned his good-natured salutation by simply nodding his head. Then, turning toward Gary again, he laid his hand roughly on the trembling man's head, and pushing it back till his face was upturned to his own, looked down into his eyes, which he could see but dimly in the gloomy light, for a full minute, and then he laughed again.

"Here, Mister—" he began, addressing the Yankee.

"Gershom," he said, quickly—"Mister Gershom."

"Mister—what?" asked Taine, turning his fingers in Gary's hair and letting the cold muzzle of the revolver touch his temple.

"Don't shoot!" whined the counterfeiter; and Taine felt him shudder.

"Shut up," he said, impatiently, waiting for the Yankee's answer. "Don't get impatient. I'll see to it that you're out of danger before the Vigilantes come—take it easy!"

"Mister Gershom," repeated the Yankee. "That's my name—Elnathan Gershom for common."

"Elnathan Gershom for common?" said Taine, with a dry laugh. "What is it for *uncommon*, then?"

"Oh, my hull name," said he, jerking one hand out of his pocket with a motion suggestive of a dancing-jack. "It's too long to use only on extra 'casions, ye see."

Then he jerked the other hand out of his other pocket.

"It's Levi—Eli—Elnathan—Gershom, in full," he went on, filling up the pauses by bringing the forefinger of his right hand down into the palm of his left, as he enunciated each name slowly. "It's very seldom that I use the hull on't—fact I never did but once; then I signed a note with a feller, and when it was due, that cussed long name o' mine had crowded his'n off'n the paper, he said—but I allers thought there was some kind of a trick about it—and they did all the collectin' business with me—and it cost me seventy-five dol

lars, I'll be sworn ! and I'll never have that name used in full ag'in till it's on my marriage certificate again, or on my tombstone—fan me with yer boot if I do !”

“ Well, Mr. Gershom,” said Taine, laughing at his oddity of speech and manner, “ have you got a match ?”

Gershom began feeling in his pockets, fumbling in first one then the other, drawling out at the same time :

“ No—yes—I guess likely—yes—I'll be sworn !”

“ All right. You'll find a piece of candle somewhere on the floor here. I wish you would get it and light it.”

“ Yes,” answered Elnathan, with ready assent.

Stepping inside, the first move he made was to stumble over the body of Barmore, and he came sprawling down by Taine's feet.

“ Jewhitaker ! Hurt my shins,” he said, caressing the wounded part as he scrambled to his feet. “ Feels like a dead body—what is it ?”

“ Maybe 'tis a dead body,” answered Taine, impatiently. “ Hurry up that light.”

In a moment the Yankee had found the candle, and to get it burning was the work of but another minute.

“ See if that man's dead,” Taine went on, pointing to the prostrate form of Harney Barmore.

Gershom knelt down by his side, and flashed the light in his face.

“ He's awful white and awful bloody,” he said.

“ Is he dead ?” asked Taine.

“ Do' know. Let me see,” answered the Yankee, unbuttoning his shirt at the neck. “ Tell you in a minute.”

In a moment he had laid his hand over his heart.

“ It beats—he's alive,” he said.

“ All right,” said Taine, coolly. “ Now bring that light here. I want to look at this trembling wretch.”

“ He's white as a corpse, I'll be sworn !” ejaculated Elnathan, as the rays from the candle fell on Gary's face—“ never see a man paler in my life.”

“ You don't look happy, Gary,” said Taine, laughing in the terrified villain's face. “ I hope you're resigned.”

Then he jammed the muzzle of the revolver against his temple with a force that left a red mark.

"How that finger of mine does jerk and twitch. I'm afraid there'll be a fatal accident soon, if I can't get better control of my nerves."

"Don't shoot—spare me!"

Taine appeared not to heed his supplications, but turning his face toward the Yankee, said, carelessly:

"See, Mr. Gershom. Observe how that finger jerks."

"Does yer weepin' go off easy?" asked Elnathan.

"Hair trigger," said Taine, laconically.

"Then this feller's life's in danger," rejoined the down-easter. "Yer losin' all command of that 'ere finger—twitches awful—ain't quiet a minit."

"Take your revolver away," pleaded Gary. "It might go off any minute—and I want to talk with you. Turn it one side a little and I'll tell you what I'll do."

"Do you want to live pretty bad?" asked Taine.

He had dropped the muzzle of the revolver a little, and held it pointed at Gary's breast now, and the quaking rascal thought he saw a ray of hope, and though it was very faint, he felt his spirits rising quite perceptibly.

"Yes—I'll—"

"How bad?" interrupted Taine.

"How—bad?" repeating the words slowly. "I can't tell."

"How many dollars' worth, I mean?"

"A thousand," he said, quickly.

"And the thousand you promised me before for keeping what I know from the Vigilantes besides, of course?" went on Taine.

"Yes."

"Jewhitaker! The critter must be made of money—solid gold from eend to 'eend!" broke in the Yankee, to whom the sum named seemed enormous. "Vallerable life, his'n—fan me with yer boot if 'tain't!"

"Never mind, Mr. Gershom," said Taine, shortly. "This is our bargain. Get up on your feet, you cowardly cur!" he added, giving Gary a vigorous kick in the ribs that brought forth a dolorous groan, "and count that money out lively. I can't stay here all night."

"Come inside," answered the counterfeiter, as he staggered up, "and you shall have it."

"Come along," said Taine, roughly, to the Yankee. "Let's see what he's got in there."

"Jeewhitaker!" the down-easter almost yelled as his eyes fell on the piles of counterfeit money. "What swads of it! More'n a million dollars, I'll be sworn!"

"No there ain't—there ain't anywhere near that amount," answered Taine; "and what there is is counterfeit. Don't get excited about trifles. Sit down there and look at it while we finish this little business of ours."

Elnathan set the candle on the table and then dropped into a chair beside it, doubling himself up like a wooden monkey, and surveyed the piles of new, crisp notes before him with eyes wide open with wonder.

"If I buy your silence, what assurance will I have that that cussed fool there won't blab every thing he's seen and heard to-night in less than twenty-four hours?" asked Gary of Taine, with a contemptuous jerk of his thumb over his shoulder at the Yankee.

Elnathan was neither blind nor deaf, and was very far from being an idiot, and he heard these words and was quick to resent the insult.

Straightening himself up all at once, he swung one of his long legs forward, and at a single stride confronted the counterfeiter. Laying a heavy hand on each of his shoulders, and thrusting his cadaverous visage into Gary's face, he drawled out, in a voice that fairly shook with sudden and powerful rage:

"*I say*, mister, did you call me—*me*, Elnathan Gershom, a fool? Did ye?—did ye now?"

Gary did not reply at first. The act was so sudden and so unexpected that it startled him, and he made an effort to wrench himself free from the Yankee's hold, but without avail.

"*I say!*" he went on, vociferously, raising one hard, bony hand as if to strike, "did ye? Did ye now? 'Cause if ye did I'm goin' to put a New England balcony over yer eye—fan me with yer boot if I don't."

Taine thrust him back with a powerful effort, for his attenuated frame was stronger than he would have guessed, saying, in a tone of command:

"Go back and sit down, Gershom. I'll see that he keeps a close mouth after this," then to Gary in reply to the question he had asked a moment before, he added : "I'll contrive some way to keep Mr. Gershom quiet, and I'll pledge you my word that you need not fear any thing from him. I guess I can silence him."

With a dissatisfied grunt, Gary took a small leathern bag from a strongly made chest standing in a corner of the room, and unwinding the long, stout string with which it was tied, set it on the table and commenced scooping a quantity of silver coin out with his hands and jingling it down beside the bag on the table. Soon he drew out a small package of bills, which he unwrapped, and laid out twenty for Taine, of one hundred dollars each.

"Genuine—genuine," Taine repeated, twenty times in succession, as he examined them one after another. "All right, Tom. Business is business, you see. Good money, every cent. Can't fool Keno Taine with a bad bill—handled too many of them—lost and made more than this in five minutes, time and again. Genuine article—no fault to find. Shake hands on it, and we'll consider it a bargain. Wait a minute—let me put up these bills."

He rolled them up carefully and put them in an inside pocket of his waistcoat, then he grasped the hand which Gary outstretched with a very bad grace, and wrung it till he almost cried out with pain."

"All right," he said, in his rapid, disjointed way. "Everything's lovely—all fair and square—goose hangs high—straight bargain—you've paid and I'll keep mum." Then his manner changed and he said, sternly, laying his hand heavily on Gary's shoulder : "It's all straight, now ; but if there's any more of your accursed treachery, remember you'll be a dead man just as soon as I can kill you ! Do you understand ? Recollect you're not to tell Joles De Kay. If you keep Harney Barnmore mum about what's occurred here to-night, I'll see what arrangements I can make with Mr. Gershom, here. I reckon I can quiet him. Are you agreed ?"

"Yes—but I'm afraid of that lantern-jawed Yankee—they all have tongues like clappers—they all tell all they know and a great deal more."

"I told you I'd 'tend to him," said Taine, half angrily. "Keno Taine never goes back on a promise."

Elnathan was on his feet again and edging slowly around toward the counterfeiter, his fist clenched, his face livid with rage.

"*I'll 'tend tew him !*" he drawled. "*I say !* what do you mean by yer slurs on the Yankees? Do yew want me to 'light on yew? If yew do, yew can be accommodated—fan me with yer boot if yew can't!"

Taine silenced him with a quick gesture of impatience.

"Never mind him, Mister Gershom," he said; "he ain't in a good humor to-night. Come with me. I want to talk with you."

Elnathan followed him sullenly, throwing an ugly glance over his shoulder at Gary as he shouldered his old shot-gun and turned away.

As he went out, his eye for the first time fell on the recumbent form of old Electa Wink, whom he had not before noticed and who had not yet awakened from her drunken sleep.

"Jee whitaker! What female's that?" he asked, with a start.

"Never mind, now," said Taine, shortly, feeling in his bosom for the locket that held the pictured face of Blanche Gaudineer. "Come."

As they passed around the corner of the old inn they were startled by a loud cry, like a woman's wail, that seemed to come from overhead, and glancing up, they beheld a white, corpse-like face, with wild, terrible eyes staring at them out of one of the chamber windows.

CHAPTER VII.

A FEW GAMES AT CARDS.

"Look there!" said Taine, pointing with his finger to the ghastly face that was staring at them out of one of the second-story windows at the north end of the old tavern. "Look there, Elnathan! What is it?"

"It's a woman, I reckon," said Elnathan, with a shudder, "but what an awful scream!"

At the instant that wild, unearthly cry first rung in his ears, Taine thought of the stories he had heard, but never credited, about the spirit that was said to have been seen just where they had seen the white face, and he could not believe but that the face they had just beheld was the same that had been seen by others before.

"They say that old shell there is haunted," he said. "That face has been seen before. Some people call it a ghost."

Elnathan trembled. There was a grain of superstition in his composition, and any thing ghastly or unearthly produced a powerful effect on his mind.

"A ghost!" he said, keeping his eyes riveted on the window, where the haunting face was still pressed against one of the lower panes. "And I've traveled all the way from Maine to this 'ere heathen land inhabited by thieves and counterfeiters, and ghosts and so on, jest to fall into their clutches at last, I'll be sworn! Fan me—Jeewhitaker! Where's it gone to so etarnal suddent?"

The phantom face had vanished!

For two whole minutes, the two men stood staring blankly at the place where it had been.

Then Taine said suddenly, laying his hand on the Yankee's arm:

"Come on—come away from here. I want to talk with you—and I don't want to see that face again—it's too ghastly!"

Elnathan swung his old shot-gun across his shoulder and followed Taine away from the backwoods tavern, past the old pine stub that had concealed him awhile before, and out along the road in the direction of the place where the gambler had awaited the approach of Joles De Kay that night. As they walked along at a somewhat rapid gait, neither referred to the adventures of the past hour, but on the contrary both maintained an unbroken silence.

But the mind of each was busy—that of Elnathan filled with the startling scenes through which he had just passed, that of Taine thronging with pictures of a time that was never to return—vivid, life-like pictures of faces that had

been lost to his sight for years ; and brightest, most striking of all was the beautiful face of Blanche Gaudineer. He walked ahead of the Yankee, and unobserved by him he drew the locket from his bosom and looked at the fair painted features it inclosed long and earnestly.

"It is Blanche," he whispered, almost under his breath.

I thought it was all over now—that I had forgotten ; but tis not so. To-night things have transpired that bring the past back—the past that I had called dead—bring this dead past back—and I see Blanche Gaudineer's face and form standing before me now just as she stood before me the last night I saw her more than seventeen years ago. I seem to see that same look of pain—that expression of terrible heart-wrung agony that was on her face that night, when I told her that she was not my wife, and seem to hear the same words she spoke then—"Then you have ruined my life, Keno Taine. God forgive you—I can not!" Then she turned away and went, hugging her baby, her baby and mine, to her bosom, out into the winter night. I went to the door and called to her to come back, but my voice was drowned by the fierce roar of the wind and the crash of the driving storm. I never saw her again. How did old Electa Wink obtain possession of this locket—the same that she hung by this slender cord, wrought by her own hands of her own golden hair, around the baby's neck less than a week before she left me? I will see the hag before another night and wring her secret from her. She knows where Blanche Gaudineer is, and she shall tell me—or die!"

As these words left his lips in an almost inaudible hiss, the expression of stern resolve on his dark face told how intensely in earnest he was ; and he carried the same fierce look on his countenance when he paused on the bank of the ravine near the boulder behind which he had lain concealed awhile before, and turning suddenly, confronted Elnathan.

"I've brought you here to make some kind of an arrangement with you about what you've seen to-night," he said.

Elnathan leaned on the barrel of his old shot-gun and eyed him askance a minute or two, then he said :

"Ye want me tew keep my mouth shet about them counterfeiters, I calc'late."

"That's it," answered Taine.

There was a sharp twinkie in the down-easter's big blue eyes as he went on :

"I kin git a cool two hundred fer doin' t'other thing, yo know.

"I know ; and I'll give you just as much to clear out and tell no tales."

"I calc'late tew dig out o' these 'ere parts," said Gershom with a smile. "S'ciety ain't right pleasant, yew see—brought up in civilized kentry. I didn't intend to remain in this section ; but I jest happened along here to-night, and hearin' an awful racket in the old house went in tew see what was goin' on—and that's how I come tew hear about the counterfeiters."

He did not deem it wise to inform Taine that he had secreted himself in the old pine stub for the express purpose of listening to his conversation with Tom Gary. Tired and weary, he had laid down to sleep in a thicket not far away, and was awakened by their voices as they neared the stub ; and when they stopped he crawled stealthily toward them, keeping it between them and himself, and ensconced himself in the aperture in the side of it.

"I come to the settlement below with some emigrants that ain't goin' any further, and I wanted to git a leetle further up. Come all the way from Maine, yew see, to speckilate out here. Sold my place nigh to Bangor for a nice leetle sum, and with it, stranger, I expect to make my independent for-tin'—fan me with yer boot if I don't."

Taine's eyes flashed and his face seemed to light up while the Yankee was speaking.

"Sold your place to pretty good advantage, eh ?" he said.

"Well, now," was the smart answer as the down-easter jammed his hand down into the depths of his trowsers pocket and closed his fingers around a well-filled wallet that lay at the bottom of it, "I didn't throw it away—you may be sworn !"

"You don't appear like a man to drive a poor bargain. I believe you'll make a good speck here."

"That's my calc'lations—calc'late tew speckilate—yew've jest hit the nail on the head. If I can't drive a good bargain, there's no use o' any other feller's tryin'. Used tew

peddle in the winter when farmin' was dull—bin in every house 'twixt Gershom Holler and Bethel more'n fifty times and sold more'n five million yards o' lace and—"

"A nice comfortable little home such as a man like you'd be apt to have," interrupted Taine. "Must have brought a good thousand, I should think."

"Purty nigh onto it," said Elnathan, with evident pride—"nine hundred and seventy-five; and I hain't used but seventy a gittin' here, so I've got the rest on it all snug and safe in my breeches."

"Nine hundred and five dollars you've got in hand," said Taine, in his careless way; "that'll do to begin on. I knew a man that commenced speculating with only five hundred, and in less than three months he cleared a plump five thousand, and he'd never had a quarter of the experience in doing business that you've had either."

Elnathan's big blue eyes brightened wonderfully at the prospect that loomed up before his mental vision just then.

"Yes, nine hundred and five now; and before I leave here I'll have twelve hundred and five—can't keep that are secret o' your'n less'n three hundred dollars."

Taine assumed an attitude of surprise.

"Three hundred!" he repeated. "Why, man, I hadn't calculated on paying you only two—that's as much as you'd get by telling the Vigilantes."

"Couldn't think of it a minit," said Gershom, quickly. "I run the risk o' bein' snatched up as an accomplice—accessory and so forth, yew see."

Taine did not reply at first; he seemed suddenly to relapse into a contemplative mood.

"Let's think of it awhile," he said, at last, turning about and sitting down on the trunk of a fallen tree close by. "I'm tired and so are you, if you've walked from the settlement to-day—it's a good thirty miles if it's a rod. Sit down and rest your legs, and we'll talk the matter over a little while. I don't believe we're a-going to disagree about the trifling matter of a hundred dollars—it wouldn't make nor break either of us, I fancy."

"Kind of a skittish place," Elnathan said, as he leaned his old shot-gun against the tree-trunk, and, resting his hands

beside it, peered half timidly over into the black depths of the ravine beyond. "Purty close to that are gully, but I reckon we won't fall off if we presarve our equilibrium by keepin' of our center o' gravity over our base, as the school-ma'am used to say."

There was several minutes' silence, during which Taine sat apparently deeply buried in thought, and Elnathan, who had never passed a moment of perfect quiet when awake in his life, hitched about uneasily.

"I can't stand this confounded mumness!" he exclaimed, at last. "Can't we dew something tew pass away time—play kurds, or somethin'?"

Taine looked up with a start, and eyed Gershom keenly as he commenced fumbling about in the inside pocket of his swallow-tailed coat.

"Do you indulge?" he asked.

"What's that?" asked Elnathan.

"Can you play, I mean?"

Another of those cute grins swept over the Yankee's face, and he answered instantly:

"Well, I reckon I can—a little, that is."

"Old sledge?" asked Taine.

"That's my main hold," answered Elnathan, drawing out a greasy, well-worn pack of cards and spreading them out on the tree-trunk between them. "Have a twist? Good game, ain't it—I'm a boss boy at it—beat every thing in our parts."

"I don't like to be beaten," said Taine, throwing one leg over the tree-trunk and facing round toward him, "but I don't think of any thing better to pass away a little time than a few games of cards—and we can make terms while we play; business and pleasure combined, you see."

The Yankee got in position with an awkward motion of one of his attenuated legs, and after shuffling the pasteboards a few seconds, laid them down on their combined seat and table with a wide flourish of his enormous hand.

"Cut for deal?" he asked. "I want yew to have just as fair a show as I have."

Taine cut a queen.

Elnathan showed an ace.

"Yours," said Taine.

"Yes—I always cut lucky," and Elnathan smiled.

The gambler smiled too, to see his complacency.

The Yankee dealt the cards, and the game began. In five minutes it was finished.

"You've beaten," said Taine, smiling again at the look of triumph on Elnathan's face, as he picked the cards up rapidly and began to shuffle them. "But it's my deal now, and I'm going to show you a trick worth two of yours. I believe I can wax you."

"Don't want to back yer opinion by a trille in the way of the root of all evil, as the parson used to say?" said the Yankee. "It'll make it livelier and more interestin' like."

Taine looked at him, and had Elnathan been half as interested in watching his face as he was in watching the cards, he would have seen that its expression betokened keen pleasure and no little satisfaction at the turn matters were taking.

"How much dare you venture?" the gambler asked, as he stopped shuffling the cards and laid them down between them.

"Never play for less than five dollars."

"You've been here before, I judge," said Taine, reaching over and giving him a commendatory tap on the shoulder, while he drew out a five-dollar bill and laid it down. "Plank your paper."

Unstrapping his old pocket-book—a large, old-fashioned sheep-skin affair—the Yankee staked his money and the game went on.

Elnathan won.

"You're a brick," said Taine. "Double it."

Each laid down ten dollars.

"I've beat ye ag'in, I'll be sworn!" cried Elnathan.

"So you have," said Taine, apparently considerably choppfallen at his non-success. "Do you want to play any more?"

"Of course I do. Double ag'in—maybe you'll git it back. Luck may turn, ye see."

"All right. Here's the stakes. Drive ahead," said Taine. "If luck don't turn before long, you'll break me clean and flat."

A few minutes passed—another game was played.

"Jewhitaker!" Elnathan almost yelled. "I've beat ag'in!"

Taine did not say any thing at first. He sat quite silent, watching Elnathan very much as a cat watches a mouse that it has caught and is playing with a little while before it gets ready to devour it. Pretty soon, with an appearance of sudden determination amounting almost to despair, he laid all the money he had on the tree-trunk.

"There!" he said, with a curse. "I'm going to beat you or lose all of it."

"Right," said Elnathan, approvingly. "I like yer grit."

"You're lucky to-night," went on Taine, "or else you're cussed good at handling the pasteboards. I've made up my mind to win something, or lose all. Will you play me? 'Twouldn't be fair, you see, not to give me a chance to win back what I've lost."

"Right, I'll be sworn!" exclaimed the Yankee, giving the pack two or three brisk turns in his hands. "I mean tew dew the fair thing by yew—fair and square's my motto. Want to double up ag'in?"

Taine nodded, and the game went on.

And they kept on playing game after game, Elnathan winning each time and doubling the stakes, till he was almost mad with his success, and Taine to all appearance insanely desperate. Elnathan watched him count his money, what he had left, and wondered if he was crazy enough to stake it and lose it.

"I'm going to try my luck once more," he said. "If we double the bet, we're even-handed to a dollar—whoever wins this time, wins all; whoever loses, loses all. If you beat me, I'm flat broke; if I beat you, you're bu'sted."

Elnathan stared at him a minute.

"It's pesky risky," he said, musingly. "If I lose all of my capital, what'll become of my speculation?"

"And if you win, you've got almost a fortune without any speculation—don't you see?" said Taine. "You ought to be willing to run the risk if I am. Luck's all on your side. You ain't going to deny me the chance to get back what I've lost—just this last chance, when you know luck says you've got ten chances of winning to my one?"

"It wouldn't hardly be a fair shake, I'll be sworn!" said

nathan, shuffling the cards contemplatively. Then he laid them down and put his money—every cent he had of his original nine hundred and five dollars and his winnings—beside Taine's.

The gambler smiled as he did so—that old, derisive smile of his; but Elnathan thought it was merely a grim smile of desperation; and both men commenced playing carefully and coolly the game that was to ruin one of them.

When they had finished, Elnathan Gershom's face was as pallid as that of a corpse, and Keno Taine, looking at him with his eyes full of triumph, saw him tremble, almost reel.

Taine scraped the money up quickly and put it in his pocket; then the tall form of the Yankee straightened up as though it was set on springs, and he confronted him with an angry, despairful look on his face, at which the gambler laughed.

"Luck's turned," he said, with a sneer. "How about your speculation, Mr. Gershom?"

"Yew've b'en foolin' me all along!" said Elnathan, hotly. "Yew've cheated me, and if yew don't give my money back I'll tell the Vigilantes what I know, and you'll hang with the rest."

Taine laughed again derisively. Then he darted his powerful arm forward, and with a prolonged cry of terror, the lank body of Elnathan Gershom shot over into the ravine.

CHAPTER VIII.

TAINE EXERTS HIS POWER AGAIN

THE dim, faint light of the dawning day streamed in through the windows of the old log tavern, when old Electa Wink awoke at last from her drunken sleep. She had been aroused by something—some sound—she knew not what, until it was repeated. Then she tottered to her feet and made her way slowly and with difficulty—for her limbs were stiff and too much weakened by her late debauch to bear the weight of her cumbersome body steadily—toward the door at the foot of the flight of steps leading to the second story.

Before she was half-way up stairs the sound was repeated and rung for the third time through the old tavern.

It was a wild and terrible cry—the same that had so startled Keno Taine and Elnathan Gershom late the previous night—the same that had issued from the lips of the phantom face they had seen pressed against the chamber window.

Soon she paused a minute before a strong, heavy door at the head of the stairs, and began fumbling about in the pocket of her greasy and tattered old dress, and presently drew forth a heavy iron key which she fitted in the lock. As she did so, the wild, unearthly yell rung in her ears again, mingled with the clanking sound of chains and manacles.

In a minute she swung the door open and slowly passed inside, and for a breath there was a silence through the old log tavern that was almost oppressive ; but it was broken by that wild, unearthly cry—the chains clanked again—there was a quick hoarse exclamation from the hag—then the sounds of a fierce struggle—another horrible shriek—a fall like that of a heavy person hurled to the floor—then the door was opened hastily, and a white figure glided out and went hurrying, with short, gasping breath and clanking chains, down the stairs and out into the dim gray of the dawning day, half running, half gliding across the road and out of sight in the bushes beyond.

When Keno Taine came early in the afternoon, determined to wrench from old Electa Wink her knowledge of the fate of Blanche Gaudineer, he saw her lying cold in death in the little back room ; her pallid face scarred and disfigured and deeply gashed by some hard, ponderous weapon that had dashed her brains out apparently.

“I can’t tell you any thing about it,” said Tom Gary, when Taine questioned him. “Harney Barmore wasn’t hurt very bad, and I went pretty near morning to take him home, for after he came around again he could walk with a little help ; and when I got back, a while after daylight, I found old Electa up stairs dead.”

“Don’t you know what killed her ?” asked Taine, eying him keenly.

“I’ve told you every thing I know about it,” replied Gary.

in a sort of dogged way. "I wasn't here, and I didn't see her killed."

Taine laid his hand on his arm and fixed his dark eyes still more keenly on the counterfeiter's face.

"There's something you haven't told me," he said. "Have you no idea who or what it was that killed her?"

Gary shook his head.

Taine did not speak again for a moment or two; but he kept his hand on Gary's arm, and, by and by, said suddenly and sharply:

"Is this old shell haunted?"

"So people say," answered Gary.

"Did you ever see any thing like ghosts here?"

"No."

"Did you ever hear any strange sounds here?"

"No," Gary answered, quickly. "You don't believe all the trash people tell about this place, do you, Keno Taine? Such folks scare at their own shadows."

"I was never much of a believer in ghosts," answered Taine; "but I don't want to talk about what I believe, but what you know. Don't lie—you have heard queer noises here, and you know it."

"Nothing very queer," said Gary, evasively. "What kind of noises do you mean?"

"I mean a wild, unearthly, terrible cry that rung through this old shell twice last night after I went away. You heard it, and so did I, and I saw what made it. It came from a white, ghastly thing up in the north chamber—and I don't believe it was a ghost either."

Gary paled a little, then recovering his composure, he asked quickly:

"Did you see it?"

"Yes." Then he added, sternly, "And I want to know who—what it was!"

"People say it's a ghost. It's been seen before," answered Gary, still evading the question.

"No more of your beating round the bush," said Taine. "I want you to talk business. You know that ain't a ghost; and you know this ain't that old hag's picture—you lied when you told me so!" he added, pointing to the rigid form of old

Electa with one hand, while with the other he held up to Gary's gaze the golden locket which contained the pictured face of Blanche Gaudineer.

"How did you come by that—when did you get it?" asked Gary, reaching out his hand to take the locket.

"Never mind how I got it—hands off!" exclaimed Taine, authoritatively. "Didn't you lie when you told me that was a picture of old Electa when she was young?"

"It's just one of her jokes," replied Gary. "I've heard her tell strangers that stopped here, time and again, it was her picture—she said they used to call her the "*Flower of the Valley!*"

Taine's grip tightened on his arm, and he said, fiercely:

"Mind your eye, Tom Gary! I don't care to have you pass off any more of your second-hand jokes on me—no more on my dish, if you please. Understand?"

Gary nodded.

While he was speaking the gambler had kept his dark, searching eyes fixed steadfastly on the counterfeiter's; and they turned and wavered under his strong gaze, which Gary lacked the mental and physical strength to meet boldly and unflinchingly. Taine was beginning to exert his mesmeric power again.

"Keep your optics steady," he commanded. "Look me straight in the eyes."

It seemed in a moment as if the stronger man had imparted part of his strength to the weaker one; for Gary's eyes, which had been rolling and unsteady heretofore, fixed themselves in an unflinching gaze on those of Keno Taine.

Casting a quick glance about him, Taine noticed a chair, standing in one corner of the room and near the body of old Electa.

Gary's eyes had never left his face, and he said, looking keenly and steadily at him, and motioning toward the chair:

"Sit down there."

Gary obeyed unquestioningly and with alacrity.

"Now I am going to ask you some questions," said Taine, standing up before him; "and I want you to answer me the truth—I command that you do so."

Gary's eyes were fixed and staring, and when he spoke it

was like one in a dream, slowly and with a monotonous, half-lifeless intonation.

"Yes."

"Did you ever see Blanche Gaudineer?"

"I don't know."

"Whose picture is this?" Holding the locket up before him.

"It is Blanche—I never knew any other name."

"So far so good," thought Taine. "Just what the hag said last night."

He drew nearer to Gary.

"It is Blanche Gaudineer. Did you ever see this Blanche?"

"Yes."

"Where did you see her first?"

"Outside the door—in the cold."

Taine made a few mysterious passes up and down before his face with his hand; and Gary shivered and tried to button his coat around him, but his hands dropped weakly by his side, and he sat with chattering teeth, breathing hard like a man who is chilled almost to the vitals.

"Was it very cold?" asked Taine.

"Yes—ye—es—just as 'tis now," Gary answered, shivering. "Ah, so cold—so cold!"

The day was very warm, and the hot sunshine streamed in through the window and over the form of the shivering counterfeiter, rendering the air within the close room oppressive, almost sickening; yet he quivered, and his teeth chattered with the cold, and he shook and trembled like one in an ague fit.

"When did you first see Blanche?" went on Taine.

Gary was silent a moment, trying to think.

"Fifteen—wait—sixteen years ago last winter—and it was cold—oh, so very cold!" he said, drawing himself inside of his coat as if striving to get out of a blast of December wind.

"Just a year after she went away from me," thought Taine. "That was seventeen years ago last winter. I see it all now—just how she looked, with her baby in her arms—as if it happened only yesterday. I thought till last night she had committed suicide or perished in the storm that night—and that the baby died, too. She was so proud—so proud

I never thought she would take it so to heart ; but, it was her pride that made her do it. I thought she would cry a little and keep on clinging to me just as she had done before ; but, I did not know her."

Then he went on again questioning Gary.

"You saw her first in the winter—" He paused a minute and half-smiled to see Gary shiver. "—In the winter more than sixteen years ago, outside the door—out in the cold?"

Gary's teeth rattled together so that he answered with great difficulty, and then the words were broken, well-nigh unintelligible.

"Yes, before my door, in the winter, more than sixteen years ago."

Taine made a few more passes with his hand, and then asked, as a change swept over Gary's face :

"Do you feel warmer now?"

"Yes.

"Tell me every thing you know about Blanche, then, from that night up to the present time," said Taine, in a tone of command. "Tell me all and tell me the truth."

"Yes," answered Gary ; then, like one talking in a state of somnolency, he went on, while Keno Taine, still keeping his eyes fixed on his face, listened with rapt attention :

"Myself and old Electa and Harney Barmore were all sitting round the fire here in this very room that night—"

"Stop !" said Taine, suddenly, interrupting him with a quick motion of the hand.

Listening a moment, he heard sounds as of some one walking about the outer room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HIDDEN ASSASSIN.

AFTER the squaw went away, Joles De Kay turned about and re-entered the cabin.

"The danger is greater than I imagined," he muttered "Lunita is serving us faithfully. I must hasten with my

work ; but I don't believe we'd better try to get this lot in circulation. It's too hazardous. We can not finish it up and get it off without exciting somebody's suspicion ; for every man in the section will have an eye to that reward as soon as they know it has been offered."

As he ceased speaking, he glanced at the windows in turn, and assuring himself that every thing was secure, sat down again and fell to work, rapidly numbering and signing the notes and placing them in their appropriate places on the piles of different denominations ranged around him on the table.

It was very late when he finished and rolled the counterfeit bills up in their paper covering. But the spirit of restlessness was upon him, and although his rest had been broken night after night by a long-protracted debauch, sleep did not come to him ; and for hours, until the gray dawn, showing dimly around the edges of a curtain at an eastern window, heralded the approaching day, he sat moodily on the rustic sofa at the side of the room, his face buried in his hands and his whole attitude and manner betraying the deepest fear and solicitude.

The candle burned away till nothing was left but a mass of spluttering grease and a remnant of wick—at times it seemed as if the light had nearly faded out, then it flared up, casting a bright glare over all in the small room, but he took no notice of it, sitting silent and motionless as a statue carved out of stone, thinking, hoping, pondering, fearing.

Several times during the weary, dragging hours, he heard Evie tossing uneasily on her bed in the adjoining apartment, and once, when he listened, he thought he detected the sounds of low sobs.

"It makes me feel like a brute," he half muttered. "It seems almost heartless to sacrifice her so—for I believe she meant it when she said she would rather die ; it would be almost a mercy to her, poor girl, if she could. Keno Taine can never make her happy. His heart is heavy with sin—hers is as pure as it is given to an earthly being's to be. 'To save my life,' she said. She would do any thing for me. God bless her ! She is more to me than a daughter could be, I believe, to most men. I can not—I will not

sacrifice her so—it is unmanly—unfair. I will tell her all—all ; and she shall choose. Oh, Evie ! Evie ! better far for you had it been if I had never—if I had left you to the terrible— Oh, Evie, child, for—”

Here the poor, weakened, besotted man broke down entirely ; his unwieldy body swayed to and fro, and great tears trickled through his fingers, and he went on in a gasp that was a half inaudible wail :

“ I—I can not—I can not tell her—it is too late—too late, now. I ought to have told her years ago—it is too late—too late ! God forgive me ! ”

The day was almost at hand when he threw himself down at last for an hour's feverish sleep, he thought ; but his exhausted nature had given out at last, and it was almost noon-day before he awoke, for Evie, knowing his wearied condition of mind and body, forbore to awaken him from the renewing slumber he so much required.

He partook of the food she set before him in silence, neither saying any thing except to remark upon the sultry, almost sweltering August morning, and making no mention of the conversation of the previous night.

His manner was constrained and preoccupied, and his face wore a wearied, moody look. She tried hard to appear in her usual happy state of mind, and even attempted once to sing a gay little song, but she broke completely down at the end of the first stanza and went away into her own room to cry by herself ; for she did not want him to see how sorely it tried her to make the sacrifice she was making for him.

A half-hour—sixty minutes—an hour and a half passed and she did not come out again, and Joles De Kay sat in his old attitude of deep trouble awaiting her appearance.

At last, tiring of waiting and wishing very much to talk with her of the future, he arose, and crossing the room, tapped gently on her door.

“ What is it, father ? ” she asked, in a low voice—not broken now nor even tremulous, but calm and steady and smoothly modulated as ever.

“ She has had a fearful struggle,” thought Joles De Kay, “ but it is past, and she has made up her mind to look her fate squarely in the face. She's braver—ah, so much braver than I ! ” Then he said :

"Come out, Evie. I'm going away soon, and I want to talk with you first."

She came out a moment later, calm and self-possessed, and he would not have known with the faint flush on her cheek and the unwavering light in her blue eyes, that they had shed a tear for a month. The first keen, sharp struggle was over, and she had tidied herself up a little and bathed her face in cold water to wash away the tear-marks, and resolved to meet her revolting, and she firmly believed, inevitable doom with as much of moral bravery and true womanly fortitude as she could summon to her aid.

"I'm going down to Tom Gary's after a little," he said, "and I may meet Taine. If I do, Evie, what answer shall I bear him?—do you still feel that you can make the sacrifice?"

"I told you, last night, that to save your life—I want you to understand that—to save you from the Vigilantes and from the rope—I would become the wife of Keno Taine. I loathe and abhor Keno Taine—he is a fiend incarnate! I would rather go to my grave than make the promises that will bind me to such a creature for life. But, my death would not save you; I can not give my life for yours, but I will marry Keno Taine, and you may live."

She stood up firmly—not a trace of the pain on her fair young face that ran riot in her heart—looking him unwaveringly in the eyes—speaking evenly and calmly as though she were not talking of a step that would make her life a shade darker and more unendurable than the death of the most hopelessly depraved, sin-laden, unrepentant villain that ever trod the earth.

He looked at her wonderingly. He could not comprehend her strange tranquillity of speech and bearing. What a strong, brave spirit she had—this slender, blue-eyed young girl, who was immolating herself for his sake! Then he bowed his head on his hands, and asked himself mentally, with another question in his heart, whether he ought not to tell her something—something that he knew she ought to have known years before. "Would she do this if she knew?"

But before an answer had formed itself in his mind, she came up to him and laid her light hand tenderly on his grizzled head.

"Look up, father; be more cheerful and hopeful. If I make this sacrifice—if you escape—will you promise to forsake your bad ways—to turn from the path you are pursuing? It is leading you straight down to the bottomless pit!"

"I promise, Evie," he answered, looking up into her eager eyes; "if you save me."

"I can not save you, father," she said, earnestly. "Look to God for that—He will, perhaps, make me the instrument of your salvation, nothing more—I can do nothing alone."

"Don't talk to me about Him, Evie. I—I can't comprehend it—I am—*lost*!"

His face was white and it looked more pinched and thin than ever with the hopeless look that was upon it; and the despair that was written on every lineament was startling, as he went on in a voice that shook with emotion:

"I am lost, both for this life and the next."

Then before she could answer, he sprung up suddenly and said quickly:

"I can't stay here—the air is too close—and I must see Tom and Harney soon. Shall I bring him—Keno Taine—here? Perhaps you would like him more if you knew him better."

"*No*!" she fairly cried out. "Don't bring him here—I don't want to see him till—till the month has passed—my last month of happiness has already passed—it ended last night. Tell him what I have decided to do; but tell him also how I hate and despise him, and that I will not see him till he comes to make me his wife."

He said nothing, but taking his rifle down from its place on some pegs driven into the wall, threw it across his shoulder and walked out of the cabin; and Evie went to a window and watched him till he was out of sight.

She stood there a little while, looking in a sad-eyed, weary way out upon the view that stretched before her and upon either hand, as far as her vision extended. First was the little clearing in which the settler's cabin stood, with her own little flower-garden in front; then came the scarcely worn highway, traveled only by the emigrant-trains; then a narrow belt of timber, and gleaming through it in the sul-

try August sun, the river—the great “Father of Waters,” hurrying onward to the gulf with a deadened roar, its muddy waters pitching and tossing in dull relief against the almost endless stretch of green prairie land beyond.

She was about to turn away to attend to her household duties, when she saw a man in the garb of a hunter coming up the road. His figure, though not large, was compactly and strongly knit, and he walked with the careless freedom of one who had been long used to the nomadic life of the Western hunter and trapper. There was something strangely familiar to Evie in his form and bearing, though when she looked at the man more closely, she was sure she had never seen him before.

While she yet looked at him, the long rifle that he had carried fell out of his hand, he threw up his arms, and with an arrow sticking in his side, fell back on the hard roadside, and lay as motionless as a corpse.

Was he one, indeed? Was he dead? Evie asked herself over and over again as she looked in a horrified way upon the still figure, expecting every moment to see the hidden assassin emerge from his concealment.

But a half-hour passed, and he did not appear.

“I must go out there,” she said, to herself. “Maybe he is not dead and I can save him. It is my duty.”

CHAPTER · X ·

THE OAKEN CHEST.

THE dilapidated, tumble-down backwoods inn again.

Turning quickly at the sounds of the footsteps in the outer room, Keno Taine peered through the crack of the door, which stood slightly ajar, and started back in surprise at seeing the lank figure of Joles De Kay standing in the center of the room, surveying with an expression of alarm and dismay on his besotted face the evidences of the struggle of the previous night.

"It's Joles De Kay," he whispered, hurriedly. "I don't want him to know that I know any thing about this business of yours and his. I'm trying to get his girl—devilish nice girl—passing myself off for nice young man, you know." Waiting a second to catch his breath, he went on going, with a wink: "Don't want him to catch me here—bad company, you know—killed dog Tray and so forth. I'm going to jump out of the window as you and Harney Barmore did last night; don't tell him, if you want to live! Understand?"

Without waiting for an answer from Gary, who had but partially recovered from the spell that had been upon him, Taine vaulted through the open window, and with a warning gesture to the counterfeiter, disappeared from view just as Joles De Kay pushed the door open and strode into the room.

He could not repress a cry of astonishment as his bleared eyes fell on the rigid form of old Electa Wink stretched out coverless in the center of the apartment, her greasy and tattered old clothing showing the shape of her regular and bony frame in a stiff, ghastly aspect that was startling at the first glance and scarcely lost any of its grim and repulsive influence afterward.

Gary got on his feet and stood staring at him in a dazed sort of a way.

"What's up, Tom?" asked De Kay, after a moment, during which he recovered somewhat from the fit of consternation that had held him as if rooted to the floor since his entrance.

"What's the matter? Who killed her? The blood on the floor out there—what does it mean? Have the Vigilantes—"

"The devil's to pay!" ejaculated Gary.

He had found his tongue at last.

"I should judge so," answered De Kay. "In the first place, Mori, the Man-Hunter, is on our track—or at least trying to get scent of us; he has offered two hundred dollars reward to any man that will give any information leading to our apprehension; in less than two days half the men in these parts will be trying to secure that reward by hunting us down. We're in a tight fix. If we get out of it with-

out having our necks stretched, we'll do well. Now I come in and find old Electa dead and the floor bespattered with blood. How did she die? What does it mean? Where's Harney Barmore? Speak up, Tom Gary; you act like a man asleep!"

"Well, maybe you wouldn't wonder at it if you—" Gary began, then remembering Taine's injunction of secrecy concerning his presence there and his knowledge of their crime, he stopped abruptly, and tacking off, went on:

"As for old Electa, I can't say any thing about how she died. I wasn't here. Something very mysterious about it. I went home with Harney and—"

"What about Harney?" asked De Kay, interrupting him.

Tom Gary was a coward and very superstitious withal—though he did not believe in the ghost that was said to haunt the north chamber of the old tavern—and Keno Taine's mysterious mesmeric power and his summary manner of dealing with such persons as were so unfortunate as to excite his fatal nervousness—more fatal to them than to him—had filled him with a wholesome terror; and with the gambler's command singing in his ears, he dared not tell the truth. But he was a ready liar, and scarcely had De Kay's question left his lips, ere he brought his predominating and perfectly developed talent into play:

"Oh, he got hurt last night," he said, readily. "You see this is how 'twas. A couple of culls came along here last night, pretty soon after you left, and wanted to stay over till morning. But I wasn't anxious to have them in here, considering the business Harney and I were doing, and so I told them we didn't keep any travelers nowadays. But they insisted on staying, and when I refused them a second time, one of them began to show his teeth. He made the remark that he could lick any man that would shut a fellow out among the musketoes on such a hot night as last was. I doubted it—Harney Barmore struck at him and then he fired a pistol at Harney and wounded him. Then I got out my revolver, and they both run away and I after them; but they got out of range before I got ready to fire. When I got back, Harney lay on the floor in a sort of a faint; and when I brought him 'round again, he felt kind of sickish like and wanted to go

home. So I went with him to kind of steady him along, and when I came back I found old Electa dead. There ain't any bullet-marks or knife-cuts on her anywhere, and I reckon one of those chaps must have choked her to death. Likely they came back while I was gone with Harney."

"And you didn't know these men?"

"No, I never saw them before."

"Do you think they found out any thing we don't want outsiders to know? Do you think they saw inside of this room when they came back? The bills were on the table here in the shanty, you know."

"No. Every thing was safe—the door was locked."

"And the windows?"

"The curtains were down close."

De Kay asked no more questions. Evidently satisfied with Gary's statement, he stood thinking intently for two or three minutes, then he said, suddenly:

"We can't hope to get this issue in circulation now. We mustn't try—it's too dangerous with that accursed two hundred dollars reward staring every poor settler for miles around in the face, and appealing to his poverty and his cupidity; for you know most people don't begin to get rich very fast here yet."

"What's to be done then?"

"We've got to hide these notes we have just struck off, and all our paper, and the dies, and, in fact, every thing that, if seen, might give any man a clue to the identity of the counterfeiters. I wish Harney was here—I'd like to know what he'd say about it. We can't keep on now—it would cost us our lives."

"I believe you're right, De Kay," said Gary, after a long pause, during which neither had spoken, though the minds of both had been busy. "We can't go on, unless we want to die; and I, for one, ain't the man to run my neck into a noose when I can just as well keep it out as not. More than a man to every dollar offered will be after that reward in less than two days. Times are tight and money's scarce just at present—'twill be a sight better after the country opens up a little more—and if they wasn't, I s'pose lots of culls would be on it for that two hundred, with both hands stretched out

to grab the pile—the poor devils! But we haven't done so bad, Joles De Kay—not so awful bad for the last few months. Let's see, there's three of us here at the head-quarters, and I guess we've made five thousand apiece, clear."

His face elongated perceptibly when he thought of the two thousand that Keno Taine had wrenched from him the night before.

"Yes, I reckon we've cleared that," said De Kay; "but what good'll money do us if we get our necks stretched? Bah! I'm tired of it all and—I'm dryer than a fish."

Gary took a flask out of a niche in the rough wall and reached it out to him.

The besotted man's pale face flushed a little—his blood-shot eyes flashed—he took a step forward, and half reached out his hand for the bottle.

Then he thought of Evie—of the promise he had made her that day. But he was too weak morally to speak of this to a man like Gary.

"No, Tom," he said, in a hesitating way that showed how great was the effort, "I won't take that—I don't want it. I'm going to keep sober till I get the rope away from around my neck."

Gary set it back without a word, but not before he had emptied half its contents down his throat; then he said to De Kay who had watched him with a longing, eager look on his face, that he hoped Harney Barnmore would be down some time during the afternoon—indeed he was sure he would be—and then they could all talk the matter over more at length.

"I won't go home till we get things fixed up a little safer than they are now," answered De Kay.

"What do you propose to do?" asked Gary.

"First, I propose to wait till Harney comes."

"What do you think we'd best do then?"

"Consider some way to hush up the matter a little—suspend business till the excitement dies away."

"Keep mum, you mean, till Mori, the Man-Hunter, leaves this section; then finish up this lot and open business again livelier than before," suggested Gary, with considerable animation at the prospect which this plan offered him of retriev-

ing his diminished fortunes—"that's what I think we'd better do."

Joles De Kay was silent a moment after this, thinking of the promise he had made Evie to forsake the dangerous path he was following—to turn from his bad ways and live a better and more honorable life, and he knew that the course Gary had outlined, and he, himself, had more than hinted at, would not tend to lead him away from the old by-ways of sin that he had pledged himself to renounce. But he was so morally and mentally impotent and so in the habit of falling readily in with any ideas Gary and Barmore, his associates, and, to a great extent, leaders in crime, might advance, that he just tipped a little nod, in reply, that was more a gesture expressive of acquiescence and approbation than an expression of the resolve he had made, and which even now was strengthening in his heart, to do better and to quit the criminal work in which, while of necessity the others recognized him as a coadjutor in view of his skill with the pen, and because they so much needed his aid, he was scarcely more than a mere tool ; for if they divided the spoils with him fairly, they never consulted with him, and Gary only listened to him now because he considered the plan he advanced by far the most feasible of any that had occurred to him. And so they waited for Harney Barmore.

At three o'clock he had not put in an appearance.

Four o'clock—five came, and he did not come.

The two men began to grow impatient.

"I don't see what's the cause of his not coming," said Gary at last, after going to the door for the twentieth time, perhaps, and returning with the report that Barmore was nowhere to be seen. "His hurt ain't bad enough to keep him indoors—just the matter of a little hole in the fleshy part of his side. If he ain't on hand within half an hour, I've got a plan, and you and I have got to put it in execution this very night."

"What plan?" asked De Kay

"Never mind," he answered, shortly ; "wait."

The half-hour passed in utter silence. Both men sat in the outer room, both thinking intently ; Gary revolving the danger they were in and calculating their chance of escape,

which he could not but confess was none of the best that might be imagined. First, he could not quite trust Keno Taine as implicitly as he wished he might, and secondly, his mind was not at ease with regard to Elnathan Gershom, who he was afraid would betray the secret he had accidentally discovered. And he was assured that any measures they might take to conceal the evidences of their illegal handicraft would tend to make the situation more secure.

"I'll tell you my plan," he said at last, breaking in upon Joles De Kay's musings concerning Evie and the promise he had made her that day. "It is this. We will pick up all of our bank bills and our dies and our ink and our machine and every thing around the house, that has ever had any thing to do with our counterfeiting work, and pack them in the old oaken chest in the other room. We'll do this right away. Then to-night—for it'll be dark—it's clouding up now, and maybe 'twill storm before ten o'clock—we'll bury the chest and old Electa in the same grave. What do you think of it? Nobody'll ever dare to dig there for any thing if they suspect. We'll set the report going that she got drunk and fell down stairs, or something of that sort."

"Nothing could be better," said De Kay. "I wish Harry could be here to help."

"After we pack the chest, I'll go down and see what's up with him."

CHAPTER XI.

THE POISONED ARROW.

LUNITA, the squaw, for it was she who had sped the arrow that laid the stranger low, had taken aim with deadly intent; and if he was not dead when Evie knelt down by his side and looked into his pallid face, he surely appeared not to have a very strong hold on life.

At the first glance at the white, upturned face, the thought that she had seen the man before, strengthened in her mind; where—when, she could not tell; but she could not rid her-

self of the idea that there was something strangely familiar about the stricken stranger.

He appeared about thirty years of age. His face was light—white now as that of a corpse—and destitute of beard ; his hair, which flowed away from his marble-like brow, unconfined by the turban-like fur cap that lay on the ground near by, was almost golden in color, and its long wavy tresses showed in bright contrast with the dark, dirty brown of the road. Looking at him steadfastly, striving to recall the time and place of their former meeting—for she could not divest herself of the notion that they had met—she was sure that when his eyes were open they appeared blue.

Running to the cabin for a cup of cold water she dashed it in his face, then raised his head and pillowed it on her lap.

She felt the still, almost rigid form jerk a little as the powers of life began to resume their sway, then the breath came back to him in quick, intermittent gasps, and his eyes opened slowly and stared in a vacant, questioning way up into her face, and as they did so the light of reason leapt into them and she saw that they were as she had imagined, blue, and very light—and very sharp and piercing, for such a color—just such eyes as she had described as belonging to the stranger who had called at the cabin the previous day. And despite the absence of the light beard which he had worn then, she knew that he was the same man—and Joles De Kay had thought that person to be none other than Mori, the Man-Hunter.

After a moment he half-raised up, and with his hand made a weak attempt to withdraw the arrow which was buried in his side ; but with a low moan of pain his eyes closed again and he sunk back and lay quite still and white as he had done before.

“He has fainted again,” thought Evie. “His pain must be terrible. That arrow has got to come out and I will withdraw it while he is unconscious.”

It was with much difficulty that she disengaged it, for the barbed point had penetrated deep into the fleshy part of his side.

He started up again with a loud cry of pain as it came

out with a quick Lard pull—for at first she had tried gently to disengage it but without avail. And as she looked at its gleaming point, she uttered a little cry of alarm.

The arrow was poisoned!

A few weeks previously, during one of her by no means infrequent visits at De Kay's cabin, Lunita had shown her some envenomed arrows, and explained to her the process by which the warriors prepared them, and with a chill of dismay at her heart, she recognized this as one of those she had seen.

Evie had ever evinced a strong interest in the squaw spy, perhaps because she was the only one of her own sex with whom it was possible, in her isolated, lonely life, for her to associate, and had always appeared deeply interested whenever she spoke of her people and their strange, wild life—and as a memento and a curiosity—Lunita had given her a tiny vial which she told her contained an antidote to the poison in which the arrow-points were envenomed, that if used immediately would often save the life of the victim.

Lunita had told her that the virus upon their points was so subtle and powerful that the least scratch—the slightest abrasure of the skin by the keen point of one of them would prove fatal; and when she saw the man sink back a third time, she thought that she could see the ghastly pallor of death creeping slowly into his face.

She knew this man was hunting down the band of border counterfeiters of which her father was a member. She knew that if he discovered their identity the band of Vigilantes at his back would mete out to them a terrible and ignominious death. She knew that Tom Gary and Harney Barmore would give half they possessed to see him dead—but she was assured that Joles De Kay would do nothing to harm him; he was not brutal or revengeful by nature, and with all his weakness and cupidity he was kindhearted and human. And she knew that he would soon be past all power to harm them, if the envenomed wound proved fatal, as she feared it would as she saw the ashen paleness deepening on his face; and if it did not, it would be days, weeks perhaps, before he could go on with his undertaking. In either case, she saw a respite for her father; and she could

not stand listlessly by and see him die if it was in her power to save him.

There was something so frank, so noble, so truly manly in that white, upturned face—that face whose lineaments betokened will and power and courage—something that appealed to her woman's heart, and she resolved to save him if God willed that he should not die.

Running back to the cabin she brought the tiny vial containing a whitish liquid, and kneeling down by the unconscious Man-Hunter, bared his side and applied it to the wound.

Then she succeeded, with her weak little hands—how she never comprehended—in dragging him to the cabin and laying him on the little sofa; and it was hours ere he opened his eyes again, but when he did she saw that he was fully conscious.

CHAPTER XII.

KENO TAINE TROUBLED WITH THE JERKS AGAIN.

"He said he was cold," muttered Keno Taine, as he struck the ground and darted away through the small field, leaping the brush fence beyond and striking out through the undergrowth, taking a circuitous course to reach the road; "he said he was cold, but I'm thinking he'll be colder yet and stiff too, by and by, if he don't tell me about Blanche Gaudineer! She lives. I know that, and living she is my wife, though I did not know it when I said the words that drove her out into that stormy December night seventeen years ago. I thought when I married her that the marriage was illegal, for I thought my wife was living. It was a lawful marriage, though I did not understand it then; for my wife died on the morning of the very day I wed Blanche Gaudineer."

He had stopped while he was speaking these words in a low voice, and stood quite still, with his folded arms resting on the broken, projecting limb of a decaying tree close by. And, as he finished, a pair of wild eyes stared at him through the leaves of a little thicket close at hand.

"And the child"—he went on, after a minute, "where is she if alive?"

Then there was another pause.

The pair of eyes—they were blue eyes, and held an enraged, cunning look—seemed to start forward.

A face was forced into view.

Keno Taine did not see it, his back being toward it and his gaze fixed on the ground at his feet.

It was a white, haggard face, with long, disheveled locks of grayish hair that had once been yellow—very thin and bony and sunken at the jaws and around the deep-set, staring eyes.

It would not require a second glance to see that it was a woman's face.

The eyes never wavered in their fixed gaze, and they flashed and glowed as if with some strong emotion as Keno Taine went on:

"But Blanche Gaudineer, living or dead, shall not stand between me and Evie De Kay."

A hand was thrust through the foliage close by the woman's face—then a wrist, and hanging to an iron band that encircled it, two or three links of a chain.

The hand made a threatening gesture at Taine.

The links clanked together.

He turned around with a start, and the face and the hand and the clanking had disappeared, but he noted the agitation of the leaves where they had been.

He peered into the thicket, pushing the bushes away that he might have a good view.

Nothing there!

"Strange!" he muttered. "The bushes didn't make a sound like that."

Then he waited and listened, watching the little thicket the while, for five minutes or more.

But neither the face nor the hand appeared again, and not the slightest rustle of the leaves told him that the thicket concealed any living thing.

"Bah!" he muttered, at last. "It was nothing. I believe I'm nervous. I'm frightened at my own shadow. Yet I'm no coward. No one ever had the hardihood to call Keno

Taine that. It would excite my nervousness. Then there 'd be a fatal accident. I'm going to see Harney Barmore. Joles De Kay is a fool. Tom Gary is a coward. Harney Barmore is neither a fool nor a coward. They will keep quiet about what has passed between them and me. But he is a devil and he'll be sure to make a row if he ain't silenced. It does make me so very nervous just to think of him. I'm all unstrung. If I should see him, I believe I'd get the jerks in my finger and may be he'd get hurt. I couldn't scare him—no use to try that game. If he should become the innocent victim of my jerks he'd be out of the way. He couldn't influence Gary and De Kay, and then I could scare them into doing any thing I demanded of them—poor cowardly fools! I'm going to set my eyes on Harney Barmore now; and if I get uncontrollably nervous, why then— Well, it's too bad, but if men will set me into a fit of the jerks, they must take the consequences; that's all—I ain't to blame!"

He passed on, and as he did so the face appeared again, the wild eyes staring out of another little clump of bushes near by, gleaming with hate—deep, bitter hatred—and implacable, unrelenting vengeance!

The hand was shaken menacingly at him.

The links hanging to the manacle at the wrist, clanked again.

But he did not hear the sound.

And he was too far away to hear a shrill voice say, in a low, rapid way, keeping time with the motion of the manacled arm:

"You will be foiled, Taine. I will foil you—I, Blanche Gaudineer—your wife, by your own confession—I will foil you, for I hate you—ay, as intensely as I loved you once!"

Then the face and the hand vanished again, and the voice was heard no more.

Tom Gary did not suspect, that night, when, after packing the oaken chest, he went to the cabin of Harney Barmore and found him lying in the middle of the room, shot through the head, that he had become the victim of Taine's fatal nervousness.

"Dead!" exclaimed Joles De Kay, when Gary told him of the result of his visit to their comrade's cabin.

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"Yes, stone-dead, with just as neat a bullet-hole in his head as you ever saw in your life."

"How did it happen? Who did it?"

"Can't tell you any thing about it," answered Gary. "His wife don't know. She was in one room and Harney in another, lying on the bed."

"Pretty soon she heard some one call out:

"'Harney Barmore.'"

"The voice sounded as though some one stood by the window outside and spoke through it to Harney inside."

"She heard him get off the bed and take two or three steps across the floor. Then she heard a pistol-shot. When she got in the other room, Harney lay stretched out on the floor as dead as a door-nail. And the mystery of the matter is that there was no one in sight."

"Just the report of the weapon and a little smoke curling in the window, and the little hole in his head, that was all there was to tell how he died. She has no more idea who killed him than I have."

"Strange!" said De Kay. "How long ago did it happen?"

"Early in the afternoon. She hadn't moved him yet, but sat on the side of the bed crying and wringing her hands as though her heart would break. She wanted me to stay, but I couldn't, for we've got a burial to attend to here. I helped her straighten him out on the bed, and then came away. If there's any thing I hate above every thing else, it's to see a woman a-sniffling round after spilt milk!" he added, brutally.

Joles De Kay looked at him in surprise. He could not comprehend his utter destitution of feeling.

The sun had set in a bank of clouds more than two hours before, and it was now quite dark, and it was easy to see that Gary had not been very far wide of the mark that afternoon when he prophesied a storm.

"Couldn't be a better night for the work in hand," he said, as he cast a sweeping glance over the somber landscape without. "Blacker than the ace of spades overhead, and a storm coming up before midnight. The worst of it all will be to dig the hole, and I reckon we'd better be at it at once, so as to get done before it rains."

They had put the body of old Electa in a long, rough box, which stood on the floor close by the side of the oaken chest; and Gary added, as he looked at them, as if to measure them with his eye:

"It'll require quite a hole to take them both in. But it's the safest. 'Here lies the body of Electa Wink, spinster, *alias* the Flower of the Valley, planted August eighth, eighteen hundred and thirty-five,' and so forth. No one would ever think of digging there for counterfeiters' tools."

"Where shall we dig the grave?" asked De Kay, with more of reverence for the dead woman than Gary had manifested, going into the outer room and returning with a shovel.

"Right out there, close to the house," answered Gary, pointing through the open window. "We'll set the light close to the window, and it will shine out enough to answer our purpose."

They worked rapidly for two hours, taking turns with the shovel and pickax, and never stopping a moment till the grave was finished, though it stormed hard, the rain falling in a slow, monotonous drizzle.

Then they bore the rude coffin of old Electa out and lowered it down in the bottom of the deep hole, with the oaken chest at the head; and when they had covered it, it was long after midnight, and they thought they were safe now from the Vigilantes.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MONTH.

AFTER a time the stranger was able to speak, though with considerable difficulty, for the pain of the envenomed wound was almost unendurable; and when Evie questioned him as to his name, he answered frankly that it was Oscar Mori.

"I thought so," said she. "I was sure when I first saw you to-day, as you lay out there in the road, dead I thought then, that you were the same man that called here yesterday, though

you had cut off your beard and your face was ghastly—whiter than it is now, if possible," she added, with a look into his pale face as it lay against the snow-white pillow which she had placed under his head.

"Yes," he replied, feebly; "I was here yesterday. I left a notice. Of course you showed it to your father when he returned— He did return, did he not?" he added, remembering that he had not yet seen him.

"He returned last night; but he went away again to-day. He will be back to night. He has no knowledge to impart that would aid you in apprehending the counterfeiters," she answered, evasively.

"I trust I shall be able to attend to my work to-morrow," he said. "The Vigilantes have been trying a long time to discover them. I hope I shall be more successful."

"Don't talk about work," she replied. "You will not be able to be out to-morrow. You must not think of work for a week, at least—perhaps it will be longer than that before you are well. I must tell you something now that you do not know yet. The arrow that pierced your side was poisoned. But I applied an antidote given me by a squaw, and I am confident it has counteracted the effect of the poison. If it had not, you would now be dead. But you will not grow better rapidly, though your pain will be less acute after a time. Your wound will be very sore. It is quite deep, and the poisoned arrow-point imparted some of its virus to the flesh, and though the antidote will prevent its proving fatal, it will not heal readily. If I had not seen you when you fell, and applied the antidote almost immediately, it is doubtful whether you would have been saved."

He seized her hand, and holding it tightly in his own, looked eagerly up into her face.

"God bless you!" he said, noticing the beautiful flush that swept over cheek and brow at his ardent glance. "God bless you! You have—"

She interrupted him with a quick gesture.

"Don't!" she said. "Don't thank me. I did no more than my duty. Thank Him," and she glanced upward, "thank Him that He made me the instrument of your salvation. But you must not talk; nothing will be of so much benefit to you

now as sleep, and the longer and deeper you sleep the better."

She turned away as she ceased speaking and passed out of the room. When she was gone, the young man closed his eyes, which had followed her till she passed out of sight, and fell to thinking that he had never seen a sweeter or more beautiful girl in his life, and her fair face and graceful form seemed before him all the while till her sweet voice at his side said, as she held a cup out toward him :

"Here, drink this. It will make you sleep."

Without a word he took it out of her hand and drained it to the dregs, and then with a grateful look in his keen blue eyes, fell back again on his pillow. The drink contained a mild opiate, and soon he dropped into a quiet slumber.

It was very late when De Kay came in that night, and Evie met him at the door, with a glad light in her eyes at seeing him sober.

"You see I mean to keep my promise, little one," he said, in a loud, clear voice. "I—

She interrupted him, telling him of the sleeper inside, whose condition demanded that he should not be disturbed by any unseemly noise. And when he had come inside, and taken a look at the young man, Evie saw that his face was very pale and wore a very scared look, the cause of which she was not slow to interpret.

"You know him," she said, in a low tone.

"Yes. Do you?" he asked. "Do you know who that man is that lies there—what he would do with me if he was well and knew who I am?"

"Yes," she whispered. "It is Mori, the Man-Hunter."

"How did you know him?" he asked.

"He told me who he was," she replied, and then, in answer to his questioning look, she told him all that had transpired since his absence, saying as she closed :

"It is our duty to save him, if we can. He need not know that you are one of the men for whom he is in search—he will not be likely to suspect it if you are friendly toward him and do what you can for him while he remains thus helplessly in our care. Promise me that you will not tell Tom Gary and Harney Barmore of his presence here. I suspect that

Lunita knows of it already ; for I can not but think that it was she who tried to kill him—though why she should have done so, I am sure I can not conjecture.”

“ You will know,” answered De Kay, “ when I tell you that Lunita, the squaw, is a spy for the counterfeiters. She tried to kill him because she knew he was trying to hunt us down.”

“ She has been here very often,” said Evie ; “ but I never suspected that—not even since I knew what you told me last night.”

“ She always came on some mission connected with our work,” answered De Kay, “ though she always made some other errand in the house, asking for food or bringing venison, or something like that, as a sort of blind, so that you or any one else who chanced to be here should not know her real business. I will obtain her promise of secrecy in regard to the presence of Oscar Mori at our cabin ; for, like you, I do not see how he can harm us lying here wounded and helpless, and I will not mention the affair to Tom Gary. Your caution, as far as it concerns Harney Barmore, is needless, for he is dead, and beyond the power to injure the Man-Hunter or receive injury at his hands.”

And as briefly as possible, he told her the story of his comrade's mysterious murder as Gary had told it to him.

“ I have not seen Keno Taine,” he said, after a long silence, during which he had sat quite still, watching the motionless figure on the little rustic sofa. “ I have had no opportunity to tell him what you said ; but I do not think he will trouble us—at least not till I report your decision to him—and then I will tell him of your wishes concerning his behavior in the interval that must elapse before you become his wife.”

Become his wife ! Evie shuddered. Somehow the idea seemed more revolting than ever just now !

“ Oh, if there was only some other way !” she murmured.

Joles De Kay saw the look of loathing and dread on her fair young face. But he answered not a word.

Taking up a candle, he bade her good-night in a low voice and shuffled off to bed, almost worn out by his night's toil.

Evie took another look into the face of the sleeper, and

leaving a light near him on a chair, sought the repose she so much needed.

A week passed by, and Oscar Mori was little better. His wound was even more painful and slower to heal than Evie had thought it would be.

But he was very patient and uncomplaining through all his terrible suffering, and as Evie looked on his pallid face, growing thinner and whiter as the days went by, and saw the patient smile with which he always greeted her, and the grateful light in his blue eyes, preternaturally bright now, whenever she performed some kindly little office for him, at last began to pity him heartily for his helpless suffering—and we all know to what tender passion pity is akin !

Joles De Kay spent most of his time at home now, though he went almost daily to consult with Tom Gary at the old inn ; but he never remained away more than an hour at a time, always returning and lending a willing hand in aiding Evie to care for their wounded guest. As he promised her, he secured the silence of Lunita, the squaw, in regard to the presence of the Man-Hunter at his cabin, and bore her message to Keno Taine, bringing back his promise not to intrude upon her until her month of liberty should draw to a close ; but the gambler assured him that he should be very punctual in fulfilling his engagement on the day appointed, adding in a jocular way that he didn't want to run the risk of being prosecuted for breach of promise.

One day while Evie was out in the forest not far from the cabin, gathering some herbs, out of which she intended to make a strengthening drink for her patient, she was startled by a strange voice behind her.

Turning, she saw the form of a woman standing a few feet away. It was quite a tall figure, clad in a long, flowing, robe-like dress of some grayish-colored fabric. Her hair was silvered, and hung in wild confusion down over her haggard face, and her large, unearthly blue eyes stared out at her in a way that made her shudder.

"What is your name, girl ?" asked the strange woman.

"Evie De Kay," answered the maiden, in a half-scared way. "Why do you ask ?"

"I thought you were called that," said the woman.

Then raising her wild eyes to heaven, she said :

"It is she! My eyes have seen her at last! Oh, God, I thank Thee!"

Then looking steadily at the frightened girl, she said, slowly and impressively :

"Beware of Taine, for he is a devil!"

A moment later and she turned and passed out of sight among the shrubbery, the clanking chain at her wrist sounding in Evie's ears like a terrible warning.

Two weeks more passed, and De Kay and Gary began to congratulate themselves on their safety. Excitement was rife in the settlements and throughout that section of the country, concerning the mysterious band of counterfeiters whose identity and place of refuge were alike unlocked secrets. Men stopped at the old tavern often, discussing with its proprietor the all-absorbing topic of the time, but no one ever seemed to suspect that he had any thing to do in the matter, more than to strive with them all for the reward which had been doubled by the Vigilantes, who offered two hundred more for any information that would result in the discovery of the whereabouts of Mori, the Man-Hunter, who had mysteriously disappeared three weeks before, and it was suspected been foully dealt with by the counterfeiters in order to rid themselves of his surveillance.

Mori did not for a moment suppose that his attentive and kind-hearted host was one of the men for whom he had been in search, and hearing of the excitement concerning his disappearance, and fearing the discovery of his whereabouts, at any time, might bring down unjust suspicion on the heads of his friends, who had done and were still doing every thing in their power to nurse him back to health and strength, found means to communicate with the chief of the Vigilantes, telling him of the attempt on his life, and assuring him that he was alive and regaining his wonted vigor, and that he hoped soon to be with them again.

There had been a marked change in the behavior of Joles De Kay, of late, which Evie was glad to notice—a change for the better. He never came home intoxicated now, and she was strong in the belief that he had renounced the bowl for-

ever ; if he had not, he had certainly gained a firm control over his appetite for strong drink. He was away but a little of the time, and he exerted himself to the utmost to make the young man's convalescence as comfortable and as endurable as possible.

Endurable ? As though Evie's sweet presence had not the power to make any thing endurable to him. He was able to sit up nearly all the while now, bolstered in a chair, and his pleasant, intelligent conversation was as much admired by Evie as were her bright smiles and winning ways by him. And Joles De Kay, taking note of their growing intimacy, hoped that Oscar Mori would soon be well enough to take his departure ; for he saw that every day he lingered there helped to render Evie's sacrifice harder. The young couple were beginning to be very much in love with each other ; and if they did not know it, he did.

The Man-Hunter was well enough to walk about the house soon, and in two or three days he announced his intention of leaving. His business would not admit of his absence any longer than the state of his health demanded, he said. He thanked them over and over again for their kindness to him, and hoped that he might be able to repay at least a tithe of it at some future time.

All the good part seemed to drop out of Evie's life when she saw him walk away, and she turned to her household duties half-faint with the thought that on the morrow she was to become the wife of Keno Taine.

CHAPTER XIV.

SAVED !

" If any person here has aught to say why this man and this woman should not be joined in the holy bonds of matrimony, let him speak now, or forever after hold his peace."

It was a strange wedding-party gathered in the little cabin of Joles De Kay. There were but four in all—but two be-

sides the groom ; and these two were Joles De Kay and the magistrate from the lower settlement, whom Taine had brought to perform the ceremony.

Evie, white to the lips, clung to the ruffian's arm, more through weakness than affection ; for she loathed and scorned him, even as she said the words that would bind her to him for life.

Taine was stern-faced and hard, and he cared as little for her great suffering as it is possible for a human being to care.

De Kay looked on with a wildly-beating heart, questioning within himself whether he should not tell her that secret which she should have known years before, and then let her make her choice, whether, to save him, she would become the wife of Keno Taine.

"It is too late," he muttered ; "too late now. In a minute more it will be over—God pity her! God help her! God bless her! She is more than a daughter to me."

There was a moment's dead silence after the magistrate uttered this customary question—a moment that seemed an age to the trembling girl.

She cast one last appealing look at Joles De Kay ; but his face was turned away.

Then she nerved herself to hear the voice of the magistrate pronounce them man and wife.

But there were hurried footsteps outside, the door was flung rudely open, and another voice—a voice that she had heard before—rung through the room clear and shrill.

The magistrate turned in consternation.

The face of Keno Taine was overspread with a deathly pallor, and he staggered back, with a low cry of dismay and surprise.

Joles De Kay stepped forward two or three steps, then stopped and stood still in the center of the room, with a dazed, startled look on his face.

"I forbid the marriage!" said the sharp voice. "I forbid the marriage, in the name of God!"

The face of the intruder was the same haggard face, with its staring blue eyes, that had peered out of the thicket at Keno Taine a month before, and the hand of iron still en-

circled the wrist of her outstretched arm, and the links of chain still hung clanking to it.

The figure was the same gray-robed figure that had appeared to Evie in the forest, and as she looked, she recognized the woman who had said:

"Beware of Taine, for he is a devil!"

"By what right do you interrupt this ceremony?" asked the magistrate, sternly.

"I am that man's wife," she said, in reply; "his lawfully wedded wife!"

"She lies!" yelled Taine. "I have no wife."

The strange woman did not heed him, but said, calmly, recking little that he stamped the floor and frothed at the mouth, in his terrible rage:

"I am his wife. No man can have two wives at the same time. And if this were not so, there is another reason why that girl could never be his wife."

"What is it?" asked De Kay, while Evie came staggering forward and laid her hand on the strange woman's arm.

"Oh, save me!" she moaned. "Save me, and I will pray God to bless you always!"

"You shall be saved," she said, gently, lifting her manacled arm and laying her hand tenderly on Evie's golden hair. "I came here to save you."

"What is the other reason?" asked the magistrate.

"It is because——"

She paused a moment, looking steadily at Keno Taine, who was livid with rage and fear. Then she went on calmly and slowly:

"Because Taine is this girl's father!"

There was a minute's dead silence.

"It's a lie!" yelled Keno Taine.

"Woman! are you mad?" asked the magistrate.

Joles De Kay did not speak; but there was no look of denial on his face.

Evie only clung closer to the woman, sobbing hysterically and trembling like an aspen.

"I call on that man there," said the woman, "to say whether or not this girl is his daughter."

"She is not," answered De Kay. "I found her in the

snow one winter's night more than sixteen years ago, when she was not more than a year old. That was the very day after I came here. I carried her home and warmed her back to life—for she was almost frozen to death. I have reared her as my own child and no one has ever known, save myself, till to-day, that she was not my own daughter. Forgive me, Evie. I have always been kind to you, and if I did not tell you of this, as I ought to have done, it was because I wanted you to love me as your father. I do not know that you are that man's child, but you are not mine, though you have been more than a daughter to me."

With a bitter imprecation on his lips, Keno Taine rushed from the house.

The magistrate made a move as if to pursue him, but the strange woman checked him, saying, bitterly :

"Leave him to me. He has wrecked my life. My vengeance will yet overtake him !"

Then throwing her arms about Evie, she said :

"I am his lawful wife—you are our child—mine ! I have saved you. You shall see me again. Then I will clear up all this mystery. I am going after him now !"

And she passed out.

"God help him if she finds him," said De Kay. "There's a devil in her heart."

CHAPTER XV.

THE PRISON-CHAMBER.

KENO TAINÉ had not got twenty rods from De Kay's cabin, when, glancing back over his shoulder, he saw the gray-robed form of her who had once been Blanche Gaudineer—who now was his wife—emerge from the door and come running down the pathway to the road.

"She is after me," he thought. "If I stop to parley with her the others will be down on me—I must hasten or all is lost. I will hide at Gary's to-night, and to-morrow I will see the Vigilantes, and Joles De Kay shall swing. My plans have been thwarted. He shall not escape."

Taking the pathway along the side of the ravine, a much shorter way than by the road, he had passed over half the distance and was beginning to congratulate himself that he had by this time been lost sight of by his enraged and deeply wronged wife, when he was startled at the sudden appearance of Mori, the Man-Hunter at his side, and the terrible words, "You are a prisoner," rung in his ears.

The Man-Hunter had lain concealed by the very boulder that had sheltered the gambler's form on the night when he lay in wait for Joles De Kay, only on the opposite side.

"Yes, yer boxed, I'll be sworn!" said a familiar voice at his side, and the lank, uncouth form of Elnathan Gershom stood before him.

There was a derisive leer on the down-easter's cadaverous face that drove Taine almost frantic with impotent rage.

"Fool!" he yelled. "Where did you come from? Did you rise from the dead?"

"Rise from the dead?" repeated Elnathan, after him. "Ye ornery fool, yew thought I was dead—yew thought yew killed me, didn't ye, pushin' of me over inter the ravine?"

"Yes. Curse you! I wish I had!" answered Taine, grinding his teeth together in his ungovernable rage.

"Well, I'm a-thinkin' yew 'll find me a darned lively corpse," said Elnathan. "I've come back to settle with you."

While this conversation was taking place the ten Vigilantes had emerged from as many different places of concealment and surrounded the trapped gambler.

"Why am I arrested?" he asked, addressing the Man-Hunter, who had just finished the operation of pulling the gambler's weapons from his belt and thrusting them in his own. "What means this insult?"

"First, for complicity with the band of counterfeiters that has so long carried on its unlawful work in this vicinity. You have taken pay of them for keeping their secret from the Vigilantes," answered Mori; "and you have been arrested, secondly, for cheating Elnathan Gershom out of his money and than seeking to take his life by pushing him over the brink of that chasm. These are the charges against you. You will have an examination, and, if you are found guilty of these crimes, the Vigilantes will deal with you as they

think proper. You will deliver up what money you have on your person. If you are cleared, I pledge you my word that every cent shall be returned to you. If not, Elnathan Gershon must be paid all that you cheated him of. Come, hand it over!"

The villain took note of the determined look in the Man-Hunter's clear blue eye, and without any hesitation he gave him what money he had in his possession.

"It's no use to deny it," he said, doggedly, after a moment's moody silence. "I'll hang any way—so I plead guilty. But I won't have to suffer alone," he added; "that's a consolation."

No one answered him, and soon the whole party set out for the old log tavern, Taine walking in their midst, well guarded on every side.

The strange, manacled woman was there before them, and when they halted before the door of the inn, she forced her way through the crowd, and gripping Taine's arm with her thin, bony hand, hissed, with her haggard face almost touching his:

"Ah! Your turn to suffer has come at last! My vengeance will surely overtake you. Your race is run!"

"Take her away!" cried Taine. "What little time I have to live, I want to live in peace."

Tom Gary did not resist when they arrested him, but cowered tremblingly in a corner of the back shanty begging for mercy till his cowardly cries were silenced by a blow from one of the Vigilantes, accompanied by a stern command to keep his mouth shut.

He confessed his crime when questioned, and no trial being deemed necessary, the leader of the Vigilantes pronounced the sentence of death upon them.

"You will both be hanged by the neck until you are dead!" he said. And the stern minions of justice were about to put the death sentence into immediate execution, when the Man-Hunter, speaking in behalf of the doomed men, begged that they might be allowed till the next morning to prepare for the great change.

"But how can we know that they will not escape before then?" said some one. "If there was only some place to confine them, now, it would be well enough."

"Some place to shut them up, you mean," said Blanche Gaudineer. "I will show you. I know a good place to shut people up. I was shut up there more than sixteen years. Come on."

They looked at her wonderingly, but before they could ask her any questions she had thrown open the door and was half-way up the stairs leading to the second story.

"Come on," she called down to them. "I will show you a good place to shut people up."

They followed her up the stairs, dragging the two men up after them. She had stopped before a heavy door. It was wide open and the large iron key was in the lock where it had been since the death of old Electa, a month before.

"In there!" she said, pointing inside. "I don't want to go in. I've been there enough. You'll find manacles and chains and rings and staples and every thing you want to fasten them with—every thing is all ready, just as he fixed it for me," and she pointed to Gary, who trembled in every joint as he was being dragged through the door into that prison room.

"It's the haunted room," said one of the men—"the very one where people have seen the woman's ghost."

"There was never any ghost seen there," said the strange creature, taking a last look inside at the two despairing men, as the Man-Hunter swung the door shut and locked it; for chaining the two doomed men had been only a minute's work. "People have imagined they saw a spirit, but it was living flesh and blood; it was a woman—and I am that woman!"

"It's a tight place enough in there," she added. "They can't get out. You've chained them to the floor, and they can't escape unless they break loose. Then they could kill some one with their manacles when they came to open the door. I did that! I killed the old hag that Tom Gary had to watch me—killed her with these links that hang on my wrist here!"

The men around her eyed her in surprise.

"I wish you would take it off," she said, reaching out her manacled wrist toward the Man-Hunter. "I think of it every time I hear them clank together—those links—they're never quiet a minute. Take them off, won't you?"

When they reached the lower part of the house, Oscar Mori, by the use of a file, which he found in the back room, took the iron band off of her wrist, and, with the others, listened with eager interest to the strange story she told.

She had wandered about from place to place and from settlement to settlement, with her babe, after that winter night when she went away from the place where she and her husband dwelt, always going west, as if in hope of finding the outer verge of civilization, where she should never see the face of man again. Sometimes she would get a ride from one settlement to another, living—how, she scarcely knew, only keeping alive—on whatever fell in her way, till, one blustering night in mid-winter, she found herself snow-bound and almost frozen to death, with her little daughter, crying piteously with hunger and cold, within sight of the lights that streamed from the windows of the old log tavern in Eastern Iowa. She tried to struggle on through the drifts, but her strength was almost gone, and the child was a heavy burden for her to bear in her weakened condition, and three times she stumbled and fell, but she struggled bravely forward, hoping, praying that she might reach the inn in safety. But the drifts were deepening as she advanced, and soon she fell again. If she could only use her hands, she thought she might get on; but she could not. There was her baby—its life far more precious to her than her own. She *must* hasten or it would die—freeze to death in her arms. Finding a sheltered spot near by, under a large tree, she wrapped the baby up closely in her old shawl and laid it down as much out of the wind and storm as she could; and then, unincumbered, succeeded at last in reaching the door of the tavern.

Gary and Barmore and old Electa Wink were within, sitting around the fire in the little back room, and aroused by her loud knock on the door, the former hastened to admit her.

She told them hurriedly about her terrible struggle with the drifting snow and where she had left the baby, and implored them to go with her and bring it in, before it died.

Taking a lantern, Tom Gary and Harney Barmore set out for the place, not far away, where she had left the child, and she went with them to make sure that there should be no mistake.

She was in advance of the others, and when she reached the tree her child was gone, Joles De Kay having passed that way and found it during her absence.

Almost frantic with grief, she followed the two men back to the tavern, and that night became an unwilling witness to a foul crime committed by Barmore and Gary. It was the murder of a land-agent who was stopping there for the night. When they discovered that she had seen the deed committed, they threatened to kill her at first, but upon her pleading for her life, immured her in the prison-chamber up-stairs, and there, chained, almost naked, and half-famished, she had been confined for more than sixteen years—till she was almost a maniac—only visited by the old hag when she was not too much inebriated to think of her or of any thing else, and receiving barely enough of the coarsest and most unpalatable remnants from the never sumptuously spread table below to sustain life.

When the Vigilantes had heard her story through, they were unanimously of the opinion that almost any death could not be too great punishment for such fiends incarnate.

Leaving a man on guard at the log tavern, Oscar Mori ordered the other Vigilantes to return to the settlement for the night, telling them to report there at daybreak the next morning, and set out for the cabin of Joles De Kay, whom, even now, he did not suspect of complicity with the counterfeiters.

He found Evie alone, and without much urging gained her consent to become his wife.

De Kay came in soon, and when the young man asked his sanction to the betrothal, he told him that Evie was not his child, and when he heard how she had been picked up out of the snow more than sixteen years previously, he knew that she was the daughter of Keno Taine and his deeply-wronged wife, whose sad recital he had but a little while before listened to. But he refrained then from telling her the fate that awaited her father—the ignominious death that was to be meted out to him the next morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

THAT night the guard before the door of the old tavern heard a light step by his side. Turning, he received a stunning blow on the head that sent him insensible to the ground.

In half an hour the building was all in a light blaze. The flames climbed its sides, went roaring up the dry roof and flared and flaunted at the ridge like red flags of victory.

Elnathan Gershom, who had sought a night's rest inside, aroused by the roaring and crackling of the devouring element, rushed out of the door with a loud shout, and stumbled over the body of the guard, falling headlong to the earth. Staggering to his feet, he dragged the unconscious man to a place of safety, and then returning made his way up the stairs to the prison-chamber.

The door was locked, and Mori, the Man-Hunter, had the key in his pocket at De Kay's cabin, a mile away!

Descending, he heard loud shouts outside, and passing out, he saw half a dozen men who had been aroused from their sleep by the conflagration and who had gathered around the old tavern, shouting and cursing in their excitement, none of them aware that two men were chained to the floor of the north chamber, struggling to break their manacles, swearing and praying, blaspheming and calling on God for mercy in the same breath!

"Hurry! For God's sake! Git a rail—any thing to batter down that door!" shouted Elnathan to the staring crowd. "They're chained there and locked in! Git something, for mercy's sake, and come with me, or we'll be too late!"

It was five minutes before he made them understand what he wanted of them. But they were too late—the stairway was a roaring furnace!

By this time Oscar Mori and Joles De Kay had arrived. While Elnathan was telling them of the failure of his attempt to save the doomed men, a voice at his side said:

"I did it—I did it! Ha! ha! ha! Those two men ruined my life, and my vengeance has overtaken them! They'll burn forever! Ha! ha! They'll burn forever and ever!"

Turning, he saw the gray-robed figure of Blanche Taine, a horrible laugh contorting her haggard face.

But a spasm froze that laugh upon her lips, and it became a wail, and tottering, she fell forward upon her face. In the frenzy of her insane triumph the tried heart had ceased to beat. She was at rest forever.

"She must have been a perfect devil!" said one of the bystanders, with a shudder. "It is too horrible even to think of!"

"No she wasn't, mister," said Elnathan. "She wasn't no devil—fan me with yer boot if she was! After Keno Taine cheated me and pushed me over the rocks, she saved my life and took care of me in the woods till I was able to go to the settlement, and lay low till I got ready to spring the trap on the counterfeiters. What she suffered in those sixteen long years, shut up in that old burnin' hulk there, it ain't for you nor me to know. Do you wonder that she wanted revenge on 'em? It was them that ruined her life, and made it a hell ten times hotter than that fire there! No, gentlemen, she wasn't no devil!"

Loud, terrible cries came ever and anon from the prison-chamber, and when they were silenced, at last, all knew, instinctively, that the two villains had met their horrible fate.

By and by the roof fell in, and then the walls toppled over; and the old backwoods hostelry was a mass of smoking tinders.

Elnathan Gershon, reimbursed from the money that had been taken from the doomed gambler, which was added to the reward offered by the Man-Hunter, invested his capital in a paying "speculation," and in time became a wealthy man, living to see his full name in print thus:

"FOR THE LEGISLATURE,
LEVI ELI ELNATHAN GERSHOM, ESQ."

But he was not elected.

It was never suspected that Joles De Kay was one of the Border Counterfeiters.

He kept his promise to Evie, altering his course of life ; and after seeing her the happy bride of Oscar Mori, he went to St. Louis, where he subsequently secured a situation in a business establishment, and lived out his days, honored and respected by all who knew him.

THE END.

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The May Queen. For an entire school.	The Genteel Cook. For two males.
Dress Reform Convention. For ten females.	Masterpiece. For two males and two females.
Keeping Bad Company. A Farce. For five males.	The Two Romans. For two males.
Courting Under Difficulties. 2 males, 1 female.	The Same. Second scene. For two males.
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Escaping the Draft. For numerous males.	The Battle Call. A Recitative. For one male.

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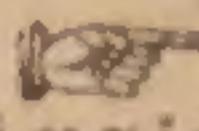
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